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# SUCCESSION PLANNING FOR FIRST-YEAR, P-12 PRINCIPALS

by

Brannon Seth Johnson

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate School,  
the College of “Education and Psychology”  
and the Department/ School of “Educational Research and Administration”  
at The University of Southern Mississippi  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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December 2018

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## ABSTRACT

In order to improve retention of first-year principals, all schools should have a leadership succession plan for first-year, P-12 principals to help improve principal effectiveness and retention (Fink & Brayman, 2006). Russell and Sabina (2014) defined succession planning as the explicit design and implementation of programs to identify and develop high-quality principal candidates. Further, succession planning is about ensuring that the next set of leaders is trained and poised to take on leadership responsibilities when needed (Beaulieu, n. d.).

It is clear that the challenges of being a principal are great, and that this is especially true during the early stages of a principal's career. Multiple research studies have been conducted regarding first-year principals' retention (Rivera-McCuthchen, 2014). As a result, factors such as ineffective mentoring, lack of support by staff members and district office personnel, little to no administrative internships, and ineffective preparation in university principalship programs have been identified. However, little to no research has been done regarding succession planning among first-year, P-12 principals. Additionally, extensive research pertaining to succession planning has been done in the business sector, but not the education sector (Russell & Sabina, 2014).

The purpose of this study was to explore and describe the succession planning process when used for first-year, P-12 principals. This study sought information regarding how transparent the succession planning process was, how widespread succession planning was, and whether it was a genuine process or merely a formality. The theoretical framework that guided this study regarded situational leadership theory.

Additionally, the following research questions guided the study: (a) How do first-year principals describe their experiences in participating in the succession planning program?, (b) What were the benefits, if any, they experienced in the succession planning program?, and (c) What, if any, negative experiences do they describe as a result of participating in the succession planning program?

The researcher interviewed ten participants in person. Six participants were first-year principals, three were assistant superintendents, and one was a superintendent. In order to answer the research questions, a basic qualitative design was used in this study, and the methods of inquiry for this phenomenological approach were semi-structured interviews, transcriptions, and field notes.

After data collection and analysis, the following themes were found: (a) Succession Planning – What’s That?; (b) Grooming One’s Own; (c) A Leadership Pipeline: A Process; (d) From Instructional Literacy Coaches (Lead Teachers) to Principals; (e) The Presence/Absence of Instructional Literacy Coaches; (f) Three Years of Experience – A Minimum Preference/Requirement for the Principalship; (g) Good Ole’ Boy System; (h) Instructional Leadership; and (i) Situational Leadership.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There were two quotes from Albert Einstein that came to mind while writing my dissertation. The first – “It is the supreme art of the teacher to awaken joy in creative expression and knowledge.” The second – “Before God, we are all equally wise and equally foolish.”

Dr. Lilian Hill, thank you for honoring me as my committee chairperson. Throughout my dissertation process, your positive attitude overcame my negativity. Your strict requirements kept me on track, and your caring attitude inspired me. I trusted you to get me through this process, and you did not let me down.

Dr. Chuck Benigno, thank you for serving as a committee member. Your passionate classroom techniques persuaded me to choose you. I admired your enthusiastic attitude from the first class you taught me.

Dr. Thomas O’Brien, thank you for serving as a committee member. I learned that you were very nurturing from a class I took under you. Your desire to help me was evident from the beginning.

Dr. David Lee, thank you for serving as a committee member. You were highly recommended by Dr. Thelma Roberson. In addition to your competence, you also nurtured, and your care for my success was invaluable.

## DEDICATION

It is with great pride and appreciation that I dedicate my dissertation to my mother, Elizabeth Saucier Morris, and my grandmother, Wilma Saucier. The following friends have also greatly influenced my desire to achieve the highest degree (PhD) that a university offers in education. These friends have motivated, mentored, advised, inspired, and encouraged me for as long as I have had associations with them. These friends are as follows: (a) Dr. Lajuan Davis, associate professor of business communication, The University of Tennessee at Martin, (b) Mrs. Kimberly Ellis, eLearning coordinator, Pearl River Community College, (c) Dr. Shelly Simmons, principal, Harrison County School District, (d) Dr. Janet White-Mountain, school psychologist, Harrison County School District, (e) Mr. Markel Knight, retired principal, Lamar County School District, and (f) Ms. Debra Ware, principal, Clarksdale Municipal School District.

I chose my mother because of her unfailing love and support throughout my life, always with my best interest supreme. I also chose my grandmother because she simply refused to let me quit. It was she who realized, early on, my best fit in life. Where I am today in my education would not be possible without these two people.

I chose my friends, listed above, because each one has played a significant role in my education as well as pursuing the highest degree. Dr. Davis gave me my first opportunity to present at an international business conference multiple times. In addition, she and I co-authored a book chapter in a business yearbook. Mr. Knight honored me with the principal's award in eighth grade. This award began my motivation to succeed and carry out the obligations that came with this award. The following friends, Mrs.

Ellis, Dr. Simmons, Dr. White-Mountain, and Ms. Ware have been invaluable and motivational in my pursuit to write my dissertation.



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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Serving as a school principal is a challenging job. The principalship is associated with a number of negative challenges such as complexity, high stress levels, high demands, and heavy workloads (Moir, 2015). According to the Institute for Education Leadership (1999), the role of the principal is simply not doable, considering the mix of little respect, meager compensation, long hours, and repeated introduction of new accountability measures. In fact, the average principal stays in his or her position for only one to three years (Goodwin, 2013).

Principals are responsible for all aspects of school management. They are expected to relate to internal and external demands that arise from different constituencies such as parents, faculty, press, school-owners, and politicians. Principals are expected to become models who influence teachers and students by their personal characteristics. These individuals are expected to be talented and knowledgeable leaders (Okutan, 2014). Further, they are expected to be instructional leaders, pioneer the success of the school, follow the school's vision, and ensure that the quality of teaching is superior (Ozdemir & Sezgin, 2002).

To be successful, principals must be versatile, competent in several areas of educational administration, and able to perform a variety of specific functions (O'Doherty & Ovando, 2013). Syed (2015) listed many of those functions: (a) monitor test scores, (b) secure resources from the central office, (c) manage budgets, (d) shape the school's vision, (e) keep students motivated, (f) assist teachers with lesson planning, (g) support teachers who are falling behind, and (h) manage student discipline. Additionally,

principals may be challenged by overwhelming paperwork and unattainable goals (Levenson, 1970). In addition to the many functions proposed by Syed (2015), there are a variety of other responsibilities that principals are expected to meet such as conducting teacher observations, leading grade-level meetings, meeting with parents, participating in community involvement, etc. At the same time, principals are expected to advocate for collaboration in the many areas of the curriculum. Principals are expected to believe in and set high expectations for their students. As leaders of their schools, they should, according to Ediger (2014), diligently attend to all responsibilities.

Due to the difficulties of the school principal role, many first-year principals are leaving their positions prematurely (Fink & Brayman, 2006). Some of those principals resign in the middle of the school year, transfer to another school/district, return to the classroom, and/or seek other careers (Fink & Brayman, 2006). According to Weick (1982), many principals are either resigning or being terminated due to not meeting accountability standards. First-year principal departures represent a substantial loss of talent to the school system.

According to a 2013 survey conducted by the First-Time Principals' Program (FTTP), 228 principals (out of 684) left their jobs during the years of 2006—2009 (Syed, 2015). Many reasons were listed on the survey; however, two commonly selected reasons were lack of support from district office administration and parents' expectations. This supports Boerema's (2011) findings that first-year principals can be overwhelmed with the demands of daily tasks. Many principals, especially first-year principals, struggle during their first year and allude to a lack of adequate support to navigate their roles (Gross, 2009).

## Professional Development Needs of First-Year Principals

Ashton and Duncan (2012) suggested that first-year principals need a toolkit as they face the many challenges of the principalship. These authors developed the following list regarding eight tools for first-year principals' success: (a) find a mentor, (b) develop personal resilience with healthy coping mechanisms, (c) develop personal resilience with purpose, (d) establish key relationships, (e) take time to build rapport with staff, students, parents, and community members (f) follow the school's vision, (g) practice time and task management, and (h) practice effective scheduling for instructional leadership.

In 1989, Huberman developed a model for the professional life cycle of teachers. This cycle was further studied by Daresh in 2007. Daresh favored Huberman's stages, but created his own – three stages of development for first-year principals. Those stages are: (a) initial career entry, (b) stabilization, and (c) risk taking or risk avoidance. In the initial career entry stage, the first-year principal is known as the rookie. The rookie is mostly interested in succeeding rather than failing. Additionally, the rookie may either experience an easy or painful beginning (Daresh, 2007).

In the stabilization stage, a sense of confidence and personal satisfaction is established. The first-year principal becomes more relaxed and begins to believe that he/she can actually perform the job. Moreover, this stage occurs regardless of an easy or painful beginning (Daresh, 2007). In the third and final stage, the risk-taking or risk-avoidance stage refers to personal and professional development. Huberman (1989) referred to the stage as interrogation and/or shock taking, meaning that one first-year principal will engage in risk-taking behaviors, experimentation, and diversification;



whereas, others will spend the majority of his/her time responding to one crisis after another (Daresh, 2007).

As a principal is progressing through Daresh's three stages of development, the first-year principal also needs to build trust with his/her staff based on the following four stages: (a) role trust, (b) practice trust, (c) integrative trust, and (d) correlative trust (Macmillan et al., 2005). In the role trust stage, the staff members expect the first-year principal to function within the legal mandate of the position, as well as aiding and abiding by the policies, regulations, and laws that govern the position. In the practice trust stage, the first-year principal's practices and actions are carefully observed by his/her staff members. In turn, these staff members can learn to anticipate how he/she will respond to and/or act in any given situation. In the integrative trust stage, staff members are able to identify the values, beliefs, and principles on which the first-year principal chooses to act. Finally, the correlative trust stage occurs when staff members understand and share the first-year principal's values and beliefs. Additionally, this stage allows for a supportive and respectful relationship with his/her staff members (Macmillan et al., 2005).

According to Boerema (2011), first-year principals face the challenge of becoming an educational leader and suggests that in order to succeed, first-year principals need effective mentors. These mentors are needed to help first-year principals to understand the magnitude of their positions as well as providing support and direction that they need (Boerema, 2011). Mentoring programs have been in existence for many decades (Hansford & Ehrich, 2006). However, Daresh (2007) noted that some mentoring programs are inadequate. Similarly, Bush and Jackson (2002) noted that few programs

present a coherent and integrated program that covers all stages of the principalship. As a result, many first-year principals are underprepared and struggle with their responsibilities.

### *Succession Planning*

In order to improve retention of first-year principals, all schools should have a leadership succession plan for first-year, P-12 principals to help improve principal effectiveness and retention (Fink & Brayman, 2006). Russell and Sabina (2014) defined succession planning as the explicit design and implementation of programs to identify and develop high-quality principal candidates. According to the authors, this method is vital and is recommended to be included within schools' improvement plans (Hargreaves, 2005). Succession planning is about ensuring that the next set of leaders is trained and poised to take on leadership responsibilities when needed (Beaulieu, n. d.). The method is commonly discussed in the private and public-sector management literature; however, it is less represented in education.

When organizations implement succession planning, a vigorous talent management process is formed. Beaulieu (n. d.). states that when succession planning is implemented, achievable results may include greater responsiveness to change, increased employee direction/motivation, and long-term effectiveness. Within the succession-planning practice, Baldwin (n.d.) identified the following advantages: (a) positive goals, (b) continuous input for ideas, (c) well-trained individuals, (d) availability of resources, and (e) an education regarding the culture of the organization.

## Problem Statement

It is clear that the challenges of being a principal are great, and that this is especially true during the early stages of a principal's career. Multiple research studies have been conducted regarding first-year principals' retention (Rivera-McCuthchen, 2014). As a result, factors such as ineffective mentoring, lack of support by staff members and district office personnel, little to no administrative internships, and ineffective preparation in university principalship programs have been identified. However, little to no research has been done regarding succession planning among first-year, P-12 principals. Additionally, extensive research pertaining to succession planning has been conducted in the business sector, but not the education sector (Russell & Sabina, 2014).

## Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore and describe the succession planning process when used for first-year, P-12 principals. This study sought information regarding how transparent the succession planning process was, how widespread succession planning was, and whether it was a genuine process or merely a formality.

## Research Questions

The research questions were as follows:

1. How do first-year principals describe their experiences in participating in the succession planning program?
2. What were the benefits, if any, they experienced in the succession planning program?

3. What, if any, negative experiences do they describe as a result of participating in the succession planning program?

#### Delimitations

A qualitative research design was used for this study. Participants were P-12 first-year principals, assistant superintendents, and one superintendent employed in Mississippi public schools. First-year, P-12 principals in private/charter schools were not sampled.

#### Assumptions

Several assumptions guided this study. The researcher assumed that the participants answered questions truthfully and to the best of their knowledge. The researcher also assumed that the participants completed the necessary requirements for principalship candidacy, including completion of required internships under the supervision of qualified mentors.

#### Justification

This study may be potentially valuable to prospective and current first-year principals. Additionally, this study may be valuable to district-level administration. Lastly, the findings may assist district-level administration with their current and/or future succession planning for first-year principals. Succession planning is well researched in the business sector, but is less commonly studied in the education sector (Russell & Sabina, 2014). If it is studied, the findings are limited, and suggests that more research is warranted.

## Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework that guided this study regarded situational leadership theory. According to Barbour (2013), a major assumption of situational leadership is that one's ability to lead or manage is dependent upon or influenced by numerous situational factors. These factors include the leader's preferred style and the behaviors of organizational members.

According to Barbour (2013), two conclusions can be made based on this assumption. The first one regards that leaders and managers, who may be effective at one place and time may become unsuccessful, either when relocated to another situation or when the factors change around them. The second one regards that success as a leader or manager may depend upon one's availability to adapt and change one behaviors as requirements and the needs of situations change.

## Definition of Terms

*First-year principal:* A principal who is in his/her first year of the principalship (Gross, 2009).

*Insider principal:* A principal who was hired from within a school district (Rivera-McCutchen, 2014).

*Internship* (in-service training): A method used in order to build and foster principal candidates with the intentions of helping them learn the necessary and applied skills required by the principalship role through the framework of a developmental and supportive relationships (Hansford & Ehrich, 2006).

*Leadership:* Involves providing a clear purpose and direction, setting goals with staff, and setting priorities that are based on district and community priorities (Ashton & Duncan, 2012).

*Leadership style:* The method used by a principal in order to express leadership, use power and authority, arrive at decision-making, and for the use of general interactions with staff and others (Smith & Piele, 1996).

*Outsider principal:* A principal who was not hired from within a school district (Rivera-McCutchen, 2014).

*Mentor:* A person who supports leadership development based on learning from experience (Boerema, 2011).

*Morale:* A theory that describes the comparative mental/emotional valence of positive or negative energy of an individual and/or of a group of individuals (Meyer et al., 2009).

*Self-efficacy:* An individual's judgement of his/her capabilities to execute and organize actions required in order to accomplish selected performances (Bandura, 1986).

*Situational leadership theory:* Also contends that there is no best way to lead/manage; it focuses on the leader's behaviors that are adopted when encountering factors within a given situation (Barbour, 2013).

*Succession planning:* The explicit design and implementation of programs to identify and develop high-quality principal candidates (Russell & Sabina, 2014).

## CHAPTER II – LITERATURE REVIEW

### Introduction

The principalship is not an easy career with multiple demands that for some, lead to job burnout. As a result, there is a high turnover. First-year principals would be prepared for the varied responsibilities of the role and would benefit from principal preparation programs. However, those programs need to be effective, and should be led only by those who have experienced the responsibilities and stresses of the principalship, meaning former principals. The purpose of this literature review is to present and analyze previous and current research on K-12 principals, also referred to as the principalship.

Several components will be addressed pertaining to the principalship. First to be addressed are principal tasks including leadership and trust-building, self-efficacy, first-year principals' challenges, job burnout, and principal turnover. Second, supports for principals include principal socialization, principal preparation programs, and succession planning. Third, two theoretical frameworks pertaining to principals, including first-year principals, are addressed and interwoven into the sections mentioned above: contingency management theory and situational leadership theory.

### The Principalship

#### *Principalship Turnover*

Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004) noted that schools experience principal turnover every three to four years. When turnover occurs, it has an adverse reaction on student achievement and school climate. In a period of increased school accountability, the public demands more effectiveness of its school leaders (Myung, Loeb, & Horng, 2011). Throughout the United States, numerous school districts

are having issues attracting and retaining principals. In fact, applicants are becoming much more selective regarding their choice of placement (Zepeda, Bengston, & Parylo, 2012).

Papa (2007) noted that principals who are aged 46 and older are more likely to remain in the principalship than younger principals. Further, Fuller and Young (2009) concluded that low retention of principals is caused by a variety of factors such as low salary, a lack of support from district-level personnel, accountability pressures, and the intensity of the principalship role. Principals are more likely to leave schools educating a large number of students and employing uncertified teachers. Principals will often leave their schools if different alternatives offer better conditions for satisfaction than their current post (Papa, 2007). In turn, if better suited principals become available, existing principals will be replaced.

Zepeda et al. (2012) affirmed that workforce trends indicate that the principalship is a less desirable position than other positions in education. Similarly, Hansford and Ehrich (2006) contended that the principalship is no longer an attractive career option due to a varied list of factors including but not limited to increasing workloads and high-stress levels. According to Russell and Sabina (2014),

“A sharp increase in responsibilities in recent years has made the principalship more stressful and has discouraged some teachers from accepting positions in administration. Principals are now being held more accountable for the performance of students and teachers, while at the same time, they are required to adhere to a growing number of government regulations.” (p. 602)



Principal shortages are more common in urban schools, especially those schools serving high percentages of students who are poor, non-White, and/or do not speak English as their first language (Loeb, Kalogrides, & Horng, 2010). According to Whitaker (2003), these shortages are also more common in middle and high schools than elementary schools.

### *Principalship Tasks*

Principals are expected to create a vision, develop a school culture, and assess outcomes pertaining to student achievement (Scribner, Crow, Lopez, & Murthadha, 2011). Principals should know about their students' emotional, cognitive, social, and developmental states. Principals are expected to deal with multiple tasks, such as managing priorities and the school budget, improvement of the school and its image, and implementing new government initiatives (Parkway & Rhodes, 1992).

Principals are expected to make personal connections to provide needed information to their staff, students, district-level administrators, and community members. They are also expected to know their social, economic, and regulatory contexts, and lastly, know pertinent information that test scores fail to provide (Leithwood & Riehl, 2005). They are expected to reduce student misbehavior and reduce chaos among staff, students, district personnel, parents and other stakeholders. Additionally, principals must be effective problem solvers in order to influence the ways that teachers, students, parents, and the community view the entire school as a learning organization.

Principals should respond to policy demands and foster processes and actions that are/can be successful in an accountability-driven environment (Scribner et al., 2011).

Principals should respond to diversity challenges and foster strong communities in schools that respect and build on the cultural capital of all students to create powerful forms of teaching and learning (Leithwood & Riehl, 2005). Lastly, principals should recognize a need to reflect on their own leadership and plan for personal improvement that enhances their self-efficacy (O'Doherty & Ovando, 2013).

According to Lunenburg (2010), there are four functions of the principalship: (a) planning, (b) organizing, (c) leading, and (d) monitoring. Planning pertains to a principal's goals of the school and how to obtain them. This function is very important because "it provides staff with a sense of purpose and direction, outlines the kinds of tasks they will be performing, and explains how their activities are related to the overall goals of the school" (Oosterlynck, 2011, p. 2). Without planning, the staff would not know how to use their instructional time and would not know and/or not care about their job responsibilities (Lunenburg, 2010). However, strategic planning should be used (Boschee, 2009). As defined by Marzano and Waters (2010), strategic planning evaluates the design policies that could facilitate change in student achievement as well as the structure of schools.

Once planning has been concluded, principals must design an organizational system that will successfully implement the plans (Lunenburg, 2010). Therefore, organizing, the second function, must occur. The plans must then be organized, involving the following three essential elements: (a) establishing common networks and patterns, (b) developing the organizational structure, and (c) acquiring and developing human resources (Argyris, 2011).

According to Lunenburg (2010), “principals should build formal communication and information networks, including the types of information to be communicated, direction of communication flows, and reductions in barriers to effective communication” (p. 3). In order for principals to develop the organizational structure, an organizational chart of the school is needed. Lastly, principals should establish policies and procedures, including the chain of command, reporting patterns, departmentalization, various administrative and subordinate responsibilities, and procedures for authority relationships.

Shortly after planning and organizing have been finalized, leading should occur. Leading, the third function, regards the communication of goals to staff members, followed by pervading them with the desire to perform at high levels (Lunenburg, 2010). According to Northouse (2010), other terms for leading are also known as collaborating, facilitating, and/or actuating. Principals are expected to influence the behavior of other people in a certain direction. However, in order to influence others, principals need to be fluent with leadership, communication, group dynamics, and motivation. Additionally, leading regards motivating staff, parents, and other stakeholders toward the attainment of his/her goals.

After all three functions have been established, monitoring, the fourth and final function should occur (Lunenburg, 2010). According to Blankstein, Houston, and Cole, (2010),

Monitoring simply consists of walking around the building to see how things are going, talking to students, visiting classrooms, talking to faculty, or it may involve

designing sophisticated information systems to check on the quality of performance, but it must be done if the principal is to be successful. (p. 4)

### Leadership

A major portion of a principal's responsibilities involve providing leadership for school staff, teachers, parents, and other stakeholders. Smith and Piele (1996) defined a leadership style as "ways in which the principal expresses leadership, uses power and authority, arrives at decisions, and in general interactions with teachers and others" (p. 696).

#### *Leadership Style*

Leadership significantly affects students' learning and should be second only to good teaching and curriculum (Leithwood & Riehl, 2005). Hoerr (2005) noted that leadership is about forming relationships and that one's leadership style determines the vision that makes leadership possible. Leadership is an important characteristic in an effective school (Hoy & Miskel, 2005), and principals are encouraged to develop their leadership capabilities (Oplatka, 2012).

Taylor, Martin, Hutchinson, and Jinks (2007) concluded that a principal's leadership style should be personal. Shatzer, Caldarella, Hallam, and Brown (2014) declared that a principal's leadership style has proven to have a meaningful impact on student achievement. The principal's leadership style comprises a person's character, motivation, as well as his/her relationship with people. Goleman (1998) recommended that "principals practice an empathetic style that allows the leader to keep people happy by caring for the whole person – not just the work task for which someone is responsible" (p. 705).

Previous research has noted that a principal's leadership style strongly influences various elements of the school environment, including student achievement and teacher and staff attitudes (Shatzer et al., 2014). According to Duke and Salmonowicz (2010), leadership is a multifaceted phenomenon that can be investigated from a variety of perspectives. Similarly, relationships exist between interactions regarding the symbolic and political dimensions of leadership, how leaders spend their time, the behaviors associated with effective leadership, and the principals' moral influences (Duke, 1998).

### Trust Building

Further to leadership, effective principals need to build trust with students, parents, teachers, staff, and other stakeholders including the community. According to Northfield (2014), trust building is "an intentional, action-oriented part of the work of principals" (p. 438). Trust building occurs with the major idea to support the work of staff in accomplishing organizational goals as well as maximizing student performance and achievement. Trust is earned and is not easily acquired simply because of a principal's position or newfound authority (Northfield, 2014). Most principals attempt to build trust among their staff beginning on the first day of their principalship. However, principals often experience difficulty with their staff, especially following the departure of a popular former principal (Oplatka, 2012).

As noted by Northfield (2014), principals have to trust that teachers will (a) build and maintain positive relationships with their students, parents, and community members; (b) make countless efforts in advancing student achievement; and (c) improve the school's image. Correspondingly, teachers expect principals to (a) provide effective

professional development and support; (b) acquire adequate teaching and learning resources; (c) maintain school operations; and (d) be a fair and ethical leader.

A principals' trustworthiness promotes school health and reflects positive school culture (Forsyth, 2008). Trust-based relationships increase the influence and frequency of organizational communication and decision-making, and as a result, positively affect and improve school functioning (Northfield, 2014). Lastly, the effectiveness of schools has been linked to principals who foster and develop trust with staff members and stakeholders (Tschannen-Moran, 2004).

Meyer et al. (2009) concluded that teacher morale is a critical factor that influences the ability of the first-year principal to carry out his/her responsibilities and to initiate change. Teachers who do not feel valued or part of the decision-making process become less committed to working outside their classrooms and tend to avoid committing to long-term needs of the school. Morale can be fostered if trust is built between first-year principals and staff. However, this practice is not always easy. Additionally, the effect of principal succession on the morale of individual teachers decreased with teachers' years of experience.

#### *A Four-Stage Continuum*

According to Northfield (2014), principals build trust among their staff within a four-stage continuum: (a) role trust, (b) practice trust, (c) integrative trust, and (d) correlative trust. In the role trust stage, staff members anticipate that the principal will function according to the given role as well as within the legal mandate of the position.

In the practice trust stage, staff members carefully observe the principal's practice and actions, and then identify how the principal will respond or act in a certain situation.

In the integrative trust stage, staff members carefully identify the principal's values and beliefs. Finally, the correlative trust stage occurs when staff members understand and share the principal's values and beliefs in a manner where both the staff members and principal are mutual and respectful (Northfield, 2014).

### Self-Efficacy and Its Relation to the Principalship

Bandura (1986) defined self-efficacy as "people's judgements of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performance" (p. 391). Self-efficacy influences cognition, emotion, and how environmental opportunities are perceived by an individual (Bandura, 1997). Additionally, self-efficacy beliefs are future-oriented and context specific, and should not be confused with general judgements about one's abilities (Federici, 2013).

Self-efficacy is grounded in Bandura's social cognitive theory, which emphasizes the evolvment and exercise of human agency (Bandura, 1997). Further, human agency is the idea that people can exercise some influence over what they do. Rather than reactive organisms shaped either by internal or external events, people are viewed as self-organizing, proactive, self-reflective, and self-regulated.

### *Self-Efficacy and the Principalship*

Federici and Skaalvik (2012) indicated that individuals' persistence, motivation, and performance are greatly influenced by self-efficacy. In order for principals to deal with multiple tasks, self-efficacy must be visible. According to Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2004), various researchers found that self-efficacy greatly benefited principals' leadership efforts, resilience facing difficult issues, and persistence.

According to McCormick (2001), self-efficacy is a vital component regarding principal functioning in dynamic environments. McCormick (2001) argued that principals' self-efficacy is critical, because it affects performance and attitudes. Moreover, self-efficacy is related to principals' commitment to organizational tasks as well as positive effects regarding his or her employees' engagement. According to Osterman and Sullivan (1996), efficacious principals are often more persistent in pursuing goals and are more adaptable to change. Moreover, Licklider and Niska (1993) found that principals' level of self-efficacy is associated with the quality of their supervision of teachers. Similarly, Smith, Guarino, Strom, and Adams (2006) found that the quality of teaching and learning is influenced by principals' self-efficacy.

Principals with high self-efficacy experience high levels of job satisfaction, work engagement, and lower levels of burnout (Federici, 2012). These principals often set challenging goals and strive to achieve these goals by making and sustaining an effort to do so (Federici, 2013). Principals with low self-efficacy tend to withdraw from activities that are perceived to be challenging and/or threatening. Rather, they focus on obstacles that will arise, and typically reduce their efforts to give up quickly on difficult tasks (Pajares, 1997).

### Challenges of First-Year Principals

First-year principals regularly experience uncertainty as they face challenges upon entering the principalship (Bengston, Zepeda, & Parylo, 2013). These challenges range from problems rooted in cultural differences to unrealistic expectations regarding the establishment and/or improvement of the school's image. Further, Hobson et al. (2003) identified the following seven common challenges faced by first-year principals: (a)



dealing with ineffective staff, (b) multitasking, (c) professional isolation, (d) issues with curricula/school improvement projects, (e) beginning the principalship with the former principal's leadership style, (f) problems with school facilities, and (g) school budget knowledge and appropriate management.

From day one after assuming the principalship, individuals are expected to possess all necessary abilities and skills in order to be successful rather than being allowed time to grow in the position (Crow, 2006; Sackney & Walker, 2006). First-year principals are often surprised by the demands and overload of the principalship (Ginty, 2005). Upon entering the principalship, first-year principals experience role conflict, confusion, conflict between obligations, and feelings of not knowing their true roles (Oplatka, 2012).

First-year principals are required to learn best practices of management, leadership, and their application in practice. Quite often, these practices include understanding and managing the school budget, responding to staff and faculty incompetence and turnover, negotiating in politics, appearing more decisive than they actually are, and lastly, balancing humanness while not appearing unable to cope (Crow, 2007).

First-year principals are required to be familiarized with various social and organizational arenas such as politics of the school community. They must develop positive relationships with their staff, students, members of the community, and other stakeholders (Ginty, 1995). Additionally, first-year principals must work at a reasonable speed and make quick and sound decisions (Parkay, Currie, & Rhodes, 1992). First-year principals experience issues regarding understanding their school and staff (Meyer,

Macmillan, & Northfield, 2009). They also often focus on management of the school and on fulfilling their mandated responsibilities while placing less emphasis on building relationships that have the potential to lead to greater teacher commitment.

Many first-year principals are faced with the ghost of principals' past and their enduring influence on the school or instead they may be expected to solve problems the former principal left unaddressed (Cheung & Walker, 2006). In addition, the information that assistant principals provide to first-year principals are critical during the early career stage. Assistant principals may greatly influence first-year principals' experience and socialization, since assistant principals are usually working at the school prior to first-year principals' arrival.

These attitudes can either be positive or negative. Further, these attitudes are more likely to affect first-year principals' sense of loneliness, isolation, and their transition into the principalship (Stephenson & Bauer, 2010). The assistant principals' reactions to first-year principals is a source of learning, as they have to handle this reaction carefully, and thereby learn more how to run the school effectively.

#### *Early Career Stages of First-Year Principals*

During the early career-stage level, first-year principals are expected to progress through a series of diverse stages during their career cycle, with each stage being characterized by variances in work attitudes and behaviors (Oplatka, 2004). In a review of the literature spanning the years of 1990 – 2011 (Oplatka, 2012), four early career stages of the principalship were identified in order to make sense of the experiences and tasks of first-year principals during their first three years. Those stages are listed as

follows: (a) induction, (b) establishment, (c) maintenance vs. renewal, and (d) disenchantment.

During the induction stage, the first-year principal undergoes socialization into the school and/or into the role. First-year principals are required to develop their own sense of confidence and quickly confront numerous issues and difficulties, such as attaining acceptance and learning the organizational culture. A first-year principal must also establish personal solutions to overcoming the insecurity of inexperience (Oplatka, 2004).

During the establishment stage, the first-year principal is characterized by enthusiasm and growth. The individual experiences growth in self-control, competence, and confidence in school management (Oplatka, 2012). Further, this individual experiences a transition from an idealistic to more realistic view of the school's reality and his/her managerial role. Unsuccessful first-year principals will experience stagnation, a loss of enthusiasm for their abilities, and disenchantment. In contrast, successful first-year principals will experience job satisfaction, self-renewal, and self-fulfillments.

In the maintenance versus renewal stage, principals with experience in the mid-career level may find that fewer opportunities for professional growth are available. During the final stage, the disenchantment stage, these individuals feel trapped and stagnated in their position with limited advancement opportunities (Oplatka, 2012). During this timeframe, frustrated individuals often become autocratic leaders by responding negatively to others. Additionally, they may experience decreased confidence and enthusiasm levels.

While these stages have been identified, it is important to remember that they are not necessarily linear. Therefore, first-year principals may move through these stages at different rates, and some may even revert to previous stages (Hall, 2002). However, Parkay et al. (1992) agreed with Oplatka's stages but added that these stages may be fragmented into the following distinctive phases: (a) survival, (b) control, (c) stability, (d) educational leadership, and (e) professional actualization.

Within the survival stage, first-year principals may experience a time of shock, insecurity, and/or inadequacy. During the control stage, a fear of losing control exists, and setting priorities is a major task. Also, first-year principals are constantly seeking solutions to manage conflicting demands. During the stability stage, a moderate position regarding school change and improvement occurs, and management-related tasks are handled effectively. The educational leadership stage notes that articulating a school vision is of the highest importance. Lastly, during the professional actualization stage, first-year principals are empowered, energized, coordinate well, and reinforce the positive traits of their subordinates (Parkay et al., 1992).

Similarly, Oplatka (2012) identified five career experiences and tasks expected in the first-year principalship. Those experiences include a feeling of shock, uncertain principal-staff relations, a fear of failure, frustration, and multitasking. Moreover, the tasks include the creation of the school vision among staff and stakeholders, the acceptance as a competent principal, school culture development, and the basic skills and competencies needed to perform the job. Not surprisingly, the effect, size, and complexity of principal tasks often lead to job burnout.

## Job Burnout

The term, burnout, initially appeared in the 1970s among individuals involved in human services (Federici & Skaalvik, 2012). Burnout, defined by Maslach (2003), is a psychological syndrome that involves a lengthy response to stressors in the workplace. Further, the most obvious sign of burnout is emotional exhaustion (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001).

Various researchers note that there are many work-related factors contributing to principals' motivation to leave the profession (Federici & Skaalvik, 2012). Friedman (2002) declared that personnel issues and irate parents are among the main stressors within the principalship. Other sources of burnout are as follows: (a) increased demands, (b) increased workloads, (c) organizational compliance, and (d) high self-imposed expectations.

According to Federici and Skaalvik (2012), the educational system is dynamic and principals need to cope with difficult tasks and relationships which often are subject to change. Complex and dynamic jobs involve exposure to a wide range of pressures, and employees in these positions are susceptible to burnout (Allison, 1997). It is rational to expect that principals may experience some kind of stress, although the reasons may differ. As noted by Federici and Skaalvik (2012), most principals cope successfully with their tasks and relations. However, burnout may be the endpoint of unsuccessful coping.

## Socialization

Bengston et al. (2013) defined socialization as “the process through which an individual learns or acquires the necessary skills, knowledge, and values needed to perform a social role in an organization” (p. 144). Hart (1993) added that socialization is

a two-part process for first-year principals. The first part pertains to the focus on the group's (staff) influence on the incoming principal, and the second part regards the incoming principal's influence on the group.

According to Van Maanen and Schein (1979), organizations use strategies of organizational socialization to guide the ways in which individuals are socialized into new roles. These structures may or may not be intentional on the part of the organization. Further, these structures often regard induction meetings, trainings, norms, cultural characteristics of the organization, and other pertinent activities (Bengston et al., 2013).

*A Period of Socialization.* When first-year principals enter the principalship, they are entering a period referred to as socialization (Bengston et al., 2013). Within this period, there are certain responses that occur. According to Bengston et al. (2013), "these responses can be viewed as resting on a continuum from an extreme custodial stance where no attempt at innovation is made to one of utmost innovation where the existing mission is challenged" (p. 147). Further, the extent to which responses are encouraged or discouraged is determined by the nature of the organization's (school district's) practices that structure the socialization experiences of the succeeding principals.

According to Bengston et al. (2013), there are three responses to socialization. Those responses are listed as follows: (a) custodianship, (b) content innovation, and (c) role innovation. The first response, custodianship, refers to when the principal accepts the status quo to ensure the existing mission, strategies, and knowledge of the school district. Content innovation, the second response, refers to when the principal seeks to change the knowledge and strategies that exist after securing the principalship position while keeping the mission of the role in mind. Finally, role innovation, the third

response, refers to when the principal seeks to change the mission, strategies, and knowledge of the role.

According to Bengston et al. (2013), the transition process into the principalship is critical due to the nature of the socialization experience. Further, the effect of principal socialization is crucial to the health and well-being of the organization. According to Hart (1993), first-year principals experience stabilization, gradual adjustments during emergent outcomes, and periods of uncertainty. Such experiences often cause these individuals to feel inadequately prepared by formal principal preparation programs (Cowie & Crawford, 2008).

Hart (1993) noted that in order to provide solutions to these negative experiences, an organizational socialization plan is needed for first-year principals. This plan should be sequential and involve divestiture processes that support the critical and occasionally fragile stages of experienced socialization. Additionally, this plan is similar to succession planning (Bengston et al., 2013). According to Normore (2004),

“the structure of a defined sequence where aspiring leaders are able to go step-by-step through a process that allow them to gradually become acclimated to the new role by ‘learning the ropes’ as they prepare for entry into the principalship not only allows the newcomer to develop certain skills and awareness, but also can create a comfort level about divesting their old professional identify for their new professional identity.” (p. 158)

*Two Categories of Socialization.* According to Hart (1993), two categories of socialization are listed as follows: (a) professional socialization, and (b) organizational socialization. These categories differ in several aspects. Professional socialization

teaches an individual the skills and dispositions necessary to belong to a particular profession, which is similar to the principalship (Talbot, 2000). Further, an example of professional socialization pertains to principals' professional experiences and their relationships with other principals (Duke, Isaacson, Sagor, & Shmuck, 1984).

Organizational socialization pertains to learning the skills, knowledge, and dispositions for functioning in a particular social system such as a school (Parkay et al., 1992). When principals enter the principalship, teachers and others hold certain expectations for their behaviors (Talbot, 2000). Additionally, school district personnel reinforce certain behaviors of the principal and withhold positive reactions to others. In turn, these behaviors affect the formation of the principal's role.

A principal may develop an informal role model relationship with another principal. When this practice occurs, they experience role taking. However, if mentors are not available, new experiences may alter the principals' beliefs and values, allowing them to experience individualized disjunctive socialization (Talbot, 2000). Additionally, if principals develop individualized responses to role taking, they will engage in role-making.

According to Talbot and Crow (1999), the principals' experience and training helps shape their views of schooling. According to Talbot (2000), "the principal's background, belief, and values are professional socialization variables" (p. 6). Further, the expectations of teachers, students, and parents provide the organizational socialization contexts within the principalship.



## Principal Preparation Programs

### *Failing Principal Preparation Programs*

Principal preparation programs are often criticized for failing to produce effective principals (Weiler & Cray, 2012). According to Weindling (2000), principal preparation programs are often inadequate in preparing first-year principals for upcoming challenges. As a result, various principal preparation programs have introduced reforms aimed at better preparing current principals and principal candidates (Weiler & Cray, 2012).

Although preparation programs focus on specific practices, no assurance is definite that new principals graduating from those programs will practice as envisioned. According to Simmons et al. (2007), principal preparation programs should search for innovative and collaborative initiatives that go beyond traditional, formal induction programs, including mentoring to assure effective socialization of first-year principals. Further, principal preparation programs generally address generic course content related to the school's management and leadership.

Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, and Meyerson (2005) contended that in order for principal preparation programs to be effective, they must include the following seven components: (a) internships, (b) a standards-based curriculum with an instructional-leadership based emphasis, (c) a clear focus and values regarding leadership and learning, (d) cohort groups that allow for collaboration and teamwork through scenario-based situations, (e) instructional strategies combining theory and practice, (f) rigorous recruitment including both candidates and faculty, and (g) strong partnerships with surrounding schools and districts that supports quality field-based learning.

Oplatka (2012) indicated that two first-year principal issues are closely related to each other: inadequate levels of training and lack of professional development support. Additionally, not all first-year principals have internships, also known as in-service training. Unfortunately, even if they have internship experiences, it does not mean that they are necessarily adequate in preparing individuals for their new role (Bush & Oduro, 2006).

Mullen and Cairns (2001) concluded that there are four major climate issues influencing effective preparation of principals: (a) the national leadership shortage, (b) the isolationist nature of school leadership, (c) an inadequate reward system for principal-candidates, and (d) principals' pressures for making good decisions in pressured situations. Further, Hansford and Ehrich (2006) affirmed that "pre-service leadership programs provided by universities should consist of internships with mentors supporting novice leaders as a way of helping leaders learn the practical and necessary skills required of the job in the context of a supportive and developmental relationship" (p. 2).

School district personnel value candidates who are willing to make a commitment to transition from educator to principal within the district (Russell & Sabina, 2014). According to Davis-Schmidt and Bottoms (2011), being an effective teacher makes a candidate more likely to become an effective principal. The development of effective principals depends on their mental models when learning the processes of the principalship (Johnson, 2008). Additionally, changing mental models is affected by experiences that challenge existing meaning structures.

### *Principal Preparation Program Formats*

According to Weiler and Cray (2012), principal preparation programs are offered in various formats, such as traditional, cohort, partnership, and online. Weiler and Cray note that there are positives and negatives associated with each format. The traditional principal preparation program consists of principal candidates taking the required courses to earn a degree. Unfortunately, common issues pertain to the inability of the university to adjust to changing trends in educational leadership. Fortunately, not all traditional programs are inadequate. According to Weiler and Cray, many principal candidates have graduated with the ability to “develop a school-wide vision, promote a healthy school culture, manage a large organization, and involve the greater community in the educational process” (p. 66).

In a cohort principal preparation program, candidates take their courses together, and enrollment in courses is restricted to those individuals who are admitted to the cohort. Moreover, two advantages have been noted regarding this program. The first one is that the overall learning is measured by principal candidates’ abilities to transfer concepts from the classroom to the school building. The second one regards that cohorts benefit principal candidates’ socially, meaning that principal candidates receive greater support in cohorts and tend to develop professional networks that continue after the program has been completed (Weiler & Cray, 2012). However, one disadvantage of this format pertains to tension and adversarial relationships that may develop.

The partnership format involves a university preparation program working in conjunction with their surrounding local school districts. This format takes into consideration the difficulties associated with adequately preparing school principals by

involving candidates in surrounding school districts and realistic issues. Further, challenges between the university and the school district are shared. The partnership offers added advantages including the development of highly qualified principals who are prepared to enter the principalship immediately following graduation (Weiler & Cray, 2012).

A successful partnership requires the university and the school district to commit the necessary time in order to promote highly qualified first-year principals. The necessary resources should also be available, including both financial and human, in order to address the complex needs of the program. Additionally, partnerships should not be considered quick/easy programs due to the significant commitment required from all members involved.

Online delivery of instruction is defined as “delivery using the Internet as a medium of communication” (Weiler & Cray, 2012, p. 67). Principal candidates who are enrolled in an online program have greater access to opportunities and convenience than candidates enrolled in face-to-face and/or hybrid sessions. Regardless of their locations, they are able to receive the same content and instruction through virtual means as compared to face-to-face classes (Weiler & Cray, 2012). Like other principal preparation programs, disadvantages exist. The instructor/professor’s commitment to careful planning for successful online instruction is not always guaranteed. Online instruction fails to replicate the same face-to-face interaction that often occurs in a classroom. Additionally, some online programs fail to adapt to the students’ needs (Weiler & Cray, 2012).

## Supports for First-Year Principals

District-level support should be offered to first-year principals (O'Doherty & Ovando, 2010). According to Scheurich and Skrla (2003), a variety of district-level supports should be offered so that first-year principals are well-informed about what types of assistance they need. Further, O'Doherty and Ovando (2013) suggest that by offering district-level supports, some first-year principal challenges may be reduced.

### *An Entry Plan and Other Supports*

O'Doherty and Ovando (2013) suggested best practices for first-year principals. Those practices are listed as follows, and much emphasis is placed on instructional leadership: first-year principals should (a) utilize district resources, (b) preplan, (c) organize, and (s) establish clear expectations for shared accountability. Further, first-year principals should build professional relationships, allow for opportunities for data-focused dialogue, have instruction-focused chats, and enforce peer walk-through observations.

Ashton and Duncan (2012) created an entry plan for first-year principals. The goal of the entry plan was to guide first-year principals as they navigate into their positions, with greater emphasis placed on educators transitioning into principalships. The following eight tips were included in the plan: (a) seek a mentor, (b) develop healthy coping mechanisms, (c) develop a purpose or purposes, (d) establish crucial relationships, (e) build rapport with all stakeholders, (f) know and practice the school and/or school district's vision statement, (g) practice good time and task management skills, and (h) practice instructional leadership.

## *Mentoring*

First-year principals benefit greatly from having mentors regarding their career experiences and development (Boerema, 2011; McCreary-Kring, 1992.) Boerema (2011) found that mentoring supports the work of the protégé. Mentoring is defined as an approach to supporting leadership development that is based on learning from experience (Simon, 2003). Mentors should have experienced the challenges of being a first-year principal themselves in order to provide the best solutions to their mentees (Boerema, 2011). Boerema notes that mentoring is often confused with coaching and/or counseling. Instead, mentoring should be an interactive process between mentors and mentees, primarily focusing on defining problems and outlining solutions. Mentoring is not the same as peer assistance or tutoring (Jacobi, 1991). Rather than a peer, a mentor should have greater experience, influence, and achievement than that of his/her mentee.

Simon (2003) noted that “mentoring links tradition with the future through helping the coming generation become its best” (p. 19). Mentoring has the ability to guide a first-year principal’s personal and career goals (McKenzie, 1989). Trust is essential to a mentoring relationship. Mentors have the ability to regularly provide professional advice and assistance, practical support, as well as teaching first-year principals how to gain confidence in themselves (Crow, 2007). When mentoring occurs, the support leads to higher levels of professional efficacy, better mechanisms to solve problems and make decisions, and a decreased sense of isolation exists (Oplatka, 2012).

A mentor should be available to his/her mentee beginning on the first day of the principalship. Boerema notes that first-year principals must take their mentors seriously and listen carefully to their mentors. First-year principals need to be shown concern for

their well-being and given affirmation and encouragement. Most importantly, the mentor and mentee should be well-matched in order to promote a successful journey.

To support Boerema's theory of mentoring, Oplatka (2012) affirmed that mentoring plays a huge impact on first-year principals' success. In a study by Oplatka, participants stated that their mentors were well-matched and life-changing. Further, it is essential to invest at the necessary level to provide mentoring for all principal-candidates in all state preparation programs.

The difference between formal versus informal mentoring was discussed by Hansford and Ehrich (2006). They defined formal mentoring as:

A structured and coordinated approach to mentoring where individuals (usually novices – mentees and more experienced persons – mentors) agree to engage in a personal and confidential relationship that aims to provide professional development, growth, and varying degrees of personal support. (p. 44)

Informal mentoring is a term used when principals solely receive support from district administrators. Individuals who have experienced informal mentoring may have the following disadvantages: (a) a lack of competency in evaluating student data, (b) being unsure of disciplinary procedures for students and teachers, (c) inability to make daily decisions, (d) inability to build and maintain relationships with all stakeholders, and (e) inability to follow principal standards. Formal mentoring should occur rather than the traditional 'informal' mentoring. However, one disadvantage of formal mentoring programs is that a match will not always occur when mentors and mentees are assigned rather than self-selected.

Hansford & Ehrich (2006) conducted a study regarding the mentoring process within the principalship, and positive and negative outcomes were found. Those positive outcomes regarded support, networking, reflections, idea sharing, and professional development. Further, those negative outcomes were due, in part, to a lack of time on both parties (mentor and mentee), the mentor's knowledge level, and personality mismatches.

### Succession Planning and Its Relation to the Principalship

Succession planning has been defined by many researchers. The most current definition derives from Peter-Hawkins, Reed, and Kingsberry (2017). These researchers defined succession planning as follows: an intentional process undertaken within a school district to allow for a smooth transition to benefit the incoming principal. Peters-Hawkins et al. (2017) indicated that:

“Succession is viewed as a dynamic process that simultaneously includes forecasting upcoming openings and preparing a pipeline of qualified individuals; sustaining leaders in their positions by providing support and mentoring, providing transparency during the transition process and enabling the gains made by one leader to be sustained in spite of the transition; and planning.” (p. 20)

School district personnel have become more demanding about replacing principals (Hargreaves, 2005). Many school districts want to ensure that they hire only the best candidates who will truly lead their schools to the best of their abilities.

According to Hargreaves (2005), “principals stand on the shoulders of those who went before them and lay the foundation for those who will follow” (p. 163). Further, the



principals' impact on their schools is greatly influenced by their predecessors and successors.

### *A Three-Stage Process*

Papa (2007) concluded that succession planning occurs in a three-stage process: pre-succession, succession, and post-succession. During the pre-succession stage, a principal's traits and attributes are matched with the organizational structure, culture, and situational context within a school district. Principals choose the school at which they will receive the greatest satisfaction from the set of schools from which they can receive a job offer. School personnel then hires those principals who they believe will yield the most desirable outcomes from the principal-applicant pool (Hoy & Miskel, 2001). During the succession stage, schools that began the process with an open principalship (an open call for applications) and the schools at which a vacancy was created have a new principal. In the final stage, post-succession, the new principals interact with their staff at their new schools.

### *Succession Planning Elements*

According to Peters-Hawkins et al. (2017), three elements are included within succession planning. Those three elements are listed as follows: (a) forecasting, (b) sustaining leadership, and (c) planning. Forecasting regards the proactive planning for anticipated vacancies (Lovely, 2004). Forecasting occurs when school district personnel nurture and develop their individual leadership pipelines (Normore, 2007). Additionally, forecasting allows for school district personnel to develop insiders' (internal employees') talent and to prepare them for anticipated principal vacancies.

In element two, sustaining leadership involves the process of acknowledging effective leadership by preparing insider candidates for succession (Hargreaves & Fink, 2003). This process includes capacity building throughout the school community and embraces notions of distributed leadership. Further, this process distributes leadership across many capable leaders at different levels within a school district (Hall, 2008).

In the third and final element, planning is the inclusive of incoming and outgoing principalship and is similar to a transition plan. This transition is noted to be proactive, and outgoing and incoming principals are encouraged to engage in dialogue (Peters, 2011).

#### *The Need for Succession Planning*

When succession planning is not incorporated, transitions can be disruptive and troubled (Fink & Brayman, 2006; Fullan, 2002). Additionally, O'Doherty and Ovando (2013) noted that "school districts may alleviate some of the challenges faced by new principals through the development of succession planning and transition protocols that offer opportunities for increased support and dialogue" (p. 557). Succession planning has the potential to alleviate some principal challenges (Fink & Brayman, 2006). Boesse (1991) suggested that succession planning is a rejuvenating process for first-year and long-term principals. According to Fink and Brayman (2006), succession planning keeps employees informed about opportunities, reduces staff turnover, provides professional development opportunities to employees, and manages knowledge and experience.

According to Fink and Brayman (2006), all school districts should participate in succession planning. By mandating succession planning, administrators will be expected to accept the long-term challenges of succession and sustainability more seriously.

Succession planning is the backdrop for first-year principals' early-phase leadership (Northfield, 2014). This practice is an opportunity for re-examination of a school's culture and exposes the potential vulnerability of all constituents with regard to the dynamics of administrative procedures and collaborative relationships (Meyer et al., 2009). Further, this practice is a time for transition and new role learning requiring a greater degree of organizational awareness, as well as an increased level of leadership efficacy (Northfield, 2014).

#### *'Planning' for Succession Planning*

According to Hargreaves (2005), succession planning should be planned carefully and ethically. Succession planning must focus on the identification of a pool of high-potential managers and leaders (Russell & Sabina, 2014). This pool should consist of the development which emphasizes authentic exposure to different tasks and colleagues through special work assignment and/or job rotations.

Succession planning should be aligned with the goals, strategies, and cultures within a school district. During this process, critical competencies are identified for leaders that match the current and future needs of a school district. Additionally, succession planning must involve the composition and development of the leadership team and committee members to ensure that successful succession will be a shared, distributed responsibility (Hargreaves & Fink, 2003).

School districts must carefully plan the elements needed to facilitate succession planning effectively (Peters-Hawkins et al., 2017). Succession planning planners must take the strategic plan and supports for first-year principals into consideration. Most importantly, these planners need to ensure that student achievement outcomes are being

met (Garza et al., 2014). Similarly, Groves (2007) noted that succession planning must be carefully planned, and should be an integral part of a school improvement plan. Acting school principals should purposefully identify teachers or other personnel who have clearly demonstrated leadership talent for upcoming principalship positions (Pounder & Crow, 2005). Further, Peters-Hawkins et al. (2017) indicated that:

“Succession is viewed as a dynamic process that simultaneously includes forecasting upcoming openings and preparing a pipeline of qualified individuals; sustaining leaders in their positions by providing support and mentoring, providing transparency during the transition process and enabling the gains made by one leader to be sustained in spite of the transition; and planning in a deliberate organized manner for the inevitability of change in leadership.” (p. 25)

Human resources personnel should be involved in succession planning.

Additionally, Fennell and Miller (2007) declared that all relevant members should be involved in succession planning, including school board and community members. This process allows for appropriate adjustments based on systematic inquiry during the planning phase.

### *Succession Planning Issues*

According to Friedman (1986), succession planning can be a messy process. Russell and Sabina (2014) conducted a study and developed the following five common challenges to this practice: (a) identifying and maintaining an appropriate supply of possible principal candidates, (b) matching an emphasis on internal candidates with openness to hiring external candidates, (c) refining general leadership talent while matching candidates with building need, (d) integrating succession planning with district

activities, and (e) ensuring succession-planning sustainability during a time of limited resources.

Succession planning is not an easy task (Peters-Hawkins et al., 2017). Succession planning often is more beneficial to the school district's goals than the professional goals of the principal. Any emphasis on the goals of the principal is subjugated to the overall plan of a school district. Therefore, Thompson (2010) noted that some teachers and assistant principals are often discouraged from pursuing the principalship due to this practice.

Fink and Brayman (2006) noted four major factors that make succession planning problematic. Those factors are listed as follows: (a) the turnover of principals has increased rapidly, (b) many first-year principals do not have the knowledge, training, and/or confidence for their positions, (c) some succession plans are ethically questionable, unplanned, and/or arbitrary, and (d) first-year principals should consider autonomy and time to work within their communities in order to establish and achieve meaningful school improvement goals.

#### *Insider vs. Outsider First-Year Principals*

According to Rivera-McCutchen (2014), a reoccurring question about succession planning regards whether the best method is hiring an insider (educator employed within the school district) versus hiring an outsider (educator employed outside the school district) first-year principal. Rivera-McCutchen (2014) noted that insider succession has been proven to be an especially valuable approach in schools where student performance has been positive. Insider successors may be more inclined to stay in the principalship for longer periods of times because they are committed to the school district.

Additionally, Carlson (1962) noted that insiders are beneficial for continued growth and development of a school.

In contrast, Carlson (1962) asserted that hiring insiders for principalship positions may not always lead to positive results. Insiders may cause problems due to their relationships with individuals within the school district. According to Ganz and Hoy (1977), outsider first-year principals are more likely than insiders to believe that they were hired to make changes. Further, Rivera-McCuthcen (2014) noted that “insiders face the challenges of being perceived as an ‘us’ and then feels resistance when the staff’s perception changes and categorizes the leader as a traitor” (p. 1030). Furthermore, Miskel and Cosgrove (1985) referenced that

“Insiders have the potential to produce disruption. Even though they have been integrated into the group, they may become isolated from cliques to which they did not belong and may strengthen commitments to previously loyal colleagues. As a result, rivals may raise doubts about the legitimacy of the insider’s promotion.” (p. 93)

### Summary

This chapter addressed principal turnover, including their tasks, leadership styles, mentoring programs, trust building from staff to first-year principals, various educational leadership theories, and challenges for first-year principals. Although the past and most current research have noted the many challenges of the principalship, there are supports available for first-year principals. One of those major supports include succession planning. Within the succession planning process, there are both pros and cons. Therefore, the next chapter will address the methodology of the study.

## CHAPTER III - METHODOLOGY

### Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore and describe the succession planning process when used for first-year, P-12 principals. This study sought information regarding how transparent the succession planning process was, how widespread succession planning was, and whether it was a genuine process or merely a formality.

### Research Questions

The research questions were as follows:

1. How do first-year principals describe their experiences of participating in succession planning programs?
2. What were the benefits, if any, they experienced by participating in the succession planning program?
3. What, if any, negatives experiences do they describe as a result of participating in the succession planning process?

### Participants

These participants included six first-year principals, three assistant superintendents, and one superintendent who participated in succession planning programs provided by their respective school districts.

### Instrumentation

Based on some preliminary exploration, no curricula for existing succession planning programs for P-12 administrators were found. Therefore, interviews were likely to provide the best information source. The researcher developed an interview protocol guided by the research questions (Appendix A). The researcher conducted face-to-face

interviews with six first-year principals, three assistant superintendents, and one superintendent involved in succession planning programs. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis. Additionally, personal notes, observations, and journals were made for data collection and analysis.

### Data Collections

After approval was received from the Institutional Review Board, the researcher e-mailed and called all Mississippi assistant superintendents/superintendents of education, gave a brief introduction of himself, explained his study, and inquired about present, first-year principals, involved in succession planning programs within their districts. If there were first-year principals within the districts who met the qualifications, the researcher asked for permission to be granted in order to reach out to these individuals. Once permission was granted, the researcher then e-mailed and called those first-year principals to seek their participation. The researcher also asked the assistant superintendents/superintendents supervising the first-year principal if they would also be willing to participate. If those assistant superintendents/superintendents agreed to participation, the researcher set up a time for face-to-face and/or phone interviews. After those first-year principals agreed to participate, the researcher scheduled face-to-face interviews with the participants. These interviews took place at a location selected by the participants, and their permission was ascertained for them to be audio recorded. Prior to the interviews, all participants were made aware that their names would not be used in the findings. Rather, their titles and numbers were used, e.g., first-year principal 1, assistant superintendent 1, etc. Finally, interviews were transcribed for analysis.



## Data Analysis

Once all interviews had been completed, the researcher used a systematic and rigorous analysis through a five-step process: (a) organizing the data, (b) finding and organizing ideas and concepts, (c) building overarching themes in the data, (d) ensuring validity and reliability in the data analysis and findings, and (e) finding possible and plausible explanations for findings (O'Connor & Gibson, 2003). To begin step one (organizing the data), the researcher resorted to the interview protocol by identifying and differentiating between the questions/topics that needed to be answered. Next, the researcher organized all data and then created a chart. By doing this process, the researcher was able to discover major concepts and themes.

In step two (finding and organizing ideas and concepts), the researcher searched for specific words or ideas that were consistent (O'Connor & Gibson, 2003). From there, the researcher devised a list of those words and/or ideas. This process is known as rich points. After specific words or ideas had been found, the researcher then organized, coded, or placed in categories.

In step three (building over-arching themes in the data), the researcher then looked for one or more associated themes that gave a deeper meaning to the data. Similarly, different categories were collapsed under one main over-arching theme (O'Connor & Gibson, 2003). Once steps one through three had been completed, step four (ensuring reliability and validity in the data analysis and in the findings) was done.

According to Huberman and Miles (2014), validity refers to whether the findings of the study make sense, are credible to the study's participants and readers, and portray an authentic portrait of reality. Validity is defined as the precision with which a method

measures what it is projected to measure. Further, validity is an ongoing principle maintained throughout the research process. Reliability is defined as the consistency of the research findings. In qualitative research, it addresses issues of quality and integrity (Miles and Huberman, 2014, p. 312). According to O'Connor and Gibson (2003), ensuring reliability requires meticulous efforts and assurance to consistency through interviewing, transcribing, and analyzing the findings.

Last but not least, the final stage (finding possible and plausible explanations of the findings) was completed. As suggested by O'Connor and Gibson (2003), the following questions were addressed: (a) Are these findings what you were expecting, based on the literature? (b) Were there any major surprises in the findings? and (c) How are they different/similar to what is stated in the literature from other similar studies?

## CHAPTER IV – RESULTS

### Introduction

The study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. How do first-year principals describe their experiences of participating in succession planning programs?
2. What were the benefits, if any, they experienced by participating in the succession planning program?
3. What, if any, negatives experiences do they describe as a result of participating in the succession planning process?

In order to answer these questions, a basic qualitative design was used in this study, and the findings are reported in this chapter. The methods of inquiry for this phenomenological approach were semi-structured interviews, transcriptions, and field notes. The researcher used these various sources of data to determine the experiences, potential benefits, and/or negatives pertaining to succession planning programs in interviewed P-12, public school districts in Mississippi. In order to protect the participants' identities, their titles with numbers were assigned, e.g., principal 1, principal 2, assistant superintendent 1, etc.

### Findings

#### *The Research Participants (First-Year Principals)*

The researcher interviewed ten participants in person. Six participants were first-year principals, three were assistant superintendents, and one was a superintendent. Since there were six first-year principals, the researcher was able to interview their assistant superintendents and/or superintendents, with the exception of one first-year

principal. By doing so, the researcher was able to better understand why the candidates were selected into principalship (first-year principal) positions. The participants' educational credentials ranged from a Master of Education to a Specialist in Education degree. All participants completed a minimum of a one-year internship, either within their building (school) or district. These participants were hired into principalship positions (internally). Furthermore, each participant either held a position in the building or district level, prior to becoming first-year principals. Prior to the participants' principalship positions, most participants served a minimum of three years as an assistant principal. However, two participants did not serve as assistant principals. One participant served as a Student Services Coordinator at a high school within the district, and the other one served as a math teacher and football coach within the building.

These participants were able to easily identify their leadership styles, and the leadership styles were as follows: (a) inspirational leadership, (b) instructional leadership, (c) servant leadership, and (d) situational leadership. Each participant fully explained their leadership style, by giving a personal testimony as to why their style was chosen. Some participants were eager to answer the researcher's questions (Appendix A). The other participants were not so eager to answer the questions. The researcher quickly realized that some of the participants were unaware of the concept of succession planning throughout data collection. Rather, these participants asked the researcher for a definition of succession planning prior to answering related questions.

#### *The Research Participants (Assistant Superintendents and Superintendent of Education)*

As previously noted, the remaining participants consisted of three assistant superintendents and one superintendent of education. These participants served as

supervisors to the other participants, with the exception of one assistant superintendent. Their educational backgrounds ranged from a Master's to a Doctor of Philosophy degree.

### A Narrative on the Research Participants

#### *Principal 1*

Principal 1 currently serves as a first-year principal at an upper elementary public school (grades third through fifth) in Southern Mississippi. She is a 42-year-old, Caucasian female with over 14 years of experience in education. Prior to her principalship position, she served as an assistant principal within the district. Her highest degree earned is a Specialist degree, and she completed a one-year internship position within the district. By participating in an internship, she learned many educational leadership skills, which prepared her for a principalship position.

When principal 1 was a classroom teacher, she served as a PLC (Professional Learning Community) leader within her building for many years. It was then where she excelled and realized that administration felt right in her path. She was also greatly influenced by her former principal (building). This former principal is currently the assistant superintendent within the same district (another one of the research participants). Principal 1 stated that she was inspired by her to earn a Specialist degree with an administrative licensure (486 Mississippi endorsement). Note: this licensure must be obtained in order to serve as a school administrator (assistant principal and principal) in Mississippi.

Principal 1 admitted that when her former principal advised her to earn her administrative degree, she did not think that she would make a great principal. However, she stated the following information during an interview, "I was shocked at first, but then

I spoke to my husband and he encouraged me to also pursue it. Let's put it this way, I did a lot of praying before I enrolled in the program. I honestly thought that I would retire as a teacher."

When asked which leadership style fit her best, she responded with two leadership styles. Those styles were inspirational leadership and situational leadership. Principal 1 stated that she enjoys inspiring others to do great things. Since situational leadership was noted in chapter two, the researcher further questioned her about this style. Her answer is listed as follows:

"First and foremost, I follow inspirational leadership daily. However, as you know, our city experienced a devastating tornado last year. You may have heard, but we lost three school buildings within the district. Unfortunately, one of those buildings was my school. Well, just because the building is destroyed, school must go on. Therefore, our district-level administrators made a decision to place our staff and students in a large church in one of our surrounding cities. I'll admit, I was a nervous wreck when I realized that we would be relocated. However, I kept reminding myself that this change was only temporary, as the school district had already begun the process of rebuilding my school. Therefore, I had to make the best of it, and I had to put the staff and students first. We made it work, and it was then when I realized that I also had to practice situational leadership."

Principal 1 was familiar with succession planning; however, she referred to it as a leadership pipeline – not succession planning. The researcher further asked her to explain what she meant by a leadership pipeline. Her response was as listed: "A

leadership pipeline occurs when the assistant superintendent/superintendent eyes a current assistant principal to be the next principal.”

Principal 1 further stated that her supervisors (assistant superintendent and superintendent) had never mentioned that she was hired into the principalship through succession planning. In fact, she stated that she had never heard the term succession planning used in the district by anyone. Further, principal 1 became familiar with succession planning when she was a graduate student. It was then when it was noted in an article she had read in order to write a research paper.

The researcher also asked principal 1 about her future plans. She stated that she would not be returning to graduate school, but she would like to be an administrator within the district office, i.e., director, assistant superintendent, and/or superintendent within the near future.

### *Principal 2*

Principal 2 currently serves as first-year principal at a public high school in Southern Mississippi. He is a 40-year-old, Caucasian male, and has more than 11 years in the educational sector. Prior to his principalship, he served as a history teacher at a surrounding high school. Throughout his tenure, he was greatly influenced by his principal (now retired). He said,

“My former principal gave me many leadership positions because he told me that I would be a principal one day. When he initially told me that I was going to be a principal one day, I responded with ‘whatever.’ However, he never gave up on me, and I also spoke with my wife about it. She also advised me to do it. So, I earned my degree with an administrative endorsement.”

Shortly after principal 2 earned his administrative credentials, an assistant principal's position became available at a high school (out of district). He was fortunate enough to secure the position and served in it for three years. Principal 2 was forthcoming about his leadership style. He told the researcher that he practices servant leadership. The researcher asked him to define the style. He responded with, "I work for my people. I want my people to be happy. I see myself as a very encouraging and inspiring leader. My people know to come to me for support."

However, when principal 2 was asked about his knowledge of succession planning, he stated that he had never heard of the term. He asked the researcher to briefly define succession planning. The researcher defined what it meant, and principal 2 stated that he believed that the district participates in succession planning, but he has never heard the words succession planning being used throughout the district.

The researcher asked principal 2 if he felt like he was hired through succession planning within the district. His response was,

"I feel like I was hired through succession planning, but that's not the words that I am familiar with. I was an assistant principal for three years in the district prior to my principalship position. Throughout my assistant principal tenure, I worked very closely with the school's principal, assistant superintendent, and superintendent. I believe in collaboration, and I feel that I was selected for the principalship through my means of communication."

Principal 2 also mentioned that he continues his level of communication with his staff. Every Monday, he e-mails a memo to his staff. According to principal 2, his main focus of the memo centers around the plan of events for the upcoming week, i.e.,



important dates, reminders about certain procedures, etc. Lastly, principal 2 stated that it is important for a principal to stay in contact with his staff and students.

### *Principal 3*

Principal 3 currently serves as a first-year director of alternative education in a southern public school district in Mississippi. She is a 35-year-old, Caucasian female, and has four years of experience in a public school. Her highest degree earned is a Master's. During her graduate degree work, she completed an internship within the district. Prior to her principalship, she served as a student services coordinator at a local community college, in addition to serving in the same position at a high school within the district she is currently employed. In order for the researcher to understand, principal 3 was questioned about the definition of her former position. She stated that a student services coordinator serves as the liaison for students who have learning disabilities. She further compared the position to that of a special education teacher.

When principal 3 was asked if she was inspired to become a principal, she responded with,

“I was inspired by two individuals. When I was a student services coordinator at the high school, I was told by principal that I needed to pursue an administrative position due to my leadership traits. I was actually shocked that she recognized my traits, but at the same time, I was excited that someone believed in me and wanted me to further my education, and to possibly be promoted. I was also inspired by the current assistant superintendent. She and I worked closely together within the same department at the high school. She was working on her administrative degree when I was working in a teaching position. She and I had a

talk one day regarding administrative positions. She told me that I would make a killer principal.”

In addition to the many questions asked, principal 3 was specifically asked about her leadership style. She advised the researcher that she practices instructional leadership. She further explained with,

“I want to know what my teachers are teaching and what the students are learning. I do weekly teacher observations to ensure the curriculum is being taught. I also meet with all teachers to review my observations. Instructional leadership is the ticket to student achievement.”

As to principal 3’s knowledge of succession planning, she stated that she believed succession planning meant ‘on-the-job training.’ Principal 3 was then further questioned about this phrase. Her response was, “I believe that succession planning provides current assistant principals the knowledge and training in order to become a principal within the district.” Principal 3 also stated that she was familiar with succession planning, but she believed that the district referred to it as a ‘process.’ Hence, the process equals succession planning as to hiring current assistant principals to principals.

#### *Principal 4*

Principal 4 currently serves as a first-year, middle school principal in a southern public school district in Mississippi. He is a 50-year-old Caucasian male and has more than 23 years in education. He also previously served as a math teacher and head football coach within the building.

His highest degree earned is a Master’s, and he completed a one-year internship within the same building. Principal 4 reported that he secured the principalship position

through the current human resource director. His response to the researcher's clarifying question was as follows:

On March 1, 2017, I received a phone call from the school district's human resource director. The purpose of the phone call was to inform me that the current principal had to go on medical leave, effective March 10, 2017. The director further explained that I was chosen to become the interim principal, due to the years of experience in education held, in addition to being the only teacher with an administrative endorsement within the building. Of course, I accepted the position because it was a slight pay raise. However, I was also advised that my performance in the interim position would be contingent on a permanent position the following school year.

Principal 4 was greatly influenced to enter the educational sector by his parents. His father was a teacher for three years before moving into the principalship, and his mother retired as a teacher with more than 30 years of experience. Further, principal 4 stated that his dad told him to earn the degree even if he never used it.

When asked about his leadership style, he responded with, "Situational leadership is what I use daily. It is how it sounds. I handle every matter differently. Both my assistant principal and I discuss all matters and then make the decisions accordingly. I also believe that I have a touch of instructional leadership."

As to principal 4's knowledge of succession planning, he had never heard of these terms. Principal 4 also asked the researcher to define what succession planning meant. It was at that time when principal 4 realized that he had gone through succession planning. The researcher further stated that he believed that only internal candidates were hired into

principalship positions, due to their knowledge of district policies and procedures.

Additionally, he was then asked if he had known any principals within the district who were externally-hired. His answer was ‘no.’ Further, principal 4 was asked about his future plans. His answer was very to-the-point, with a response as, “My retirement is awaiting.”

#### *Principal 5*

Principal 5 currently serves as a first-year principal at an upper elementary school (grades three through five) in Northern Mississippi. She is a 32-year-old old Caucasian female. She earned a Master’s and Specialist degree in Instructional Leadership through a university in Northern Mississippi. Prior to her principalship, she served as an elementary teacher within the building and curriculum specialist within the district. After serving a total of seven years in both positions, she applied and secured an assistant principal’s position for three years within the district.

Principal 5 stated that she was greatly influenced to go into education and to become a principal by her mother. Her mother retired as an elementary principal within the same district of her employment. She responded with, “Growing up and watching my mother go to work inspired me. She always smiled and never complained. I just knew that she was stressed, but she did a good job not to show it.”

Principal 5 stated that her leadership style was motivational. She said that both her mother and former principal practice this leadership style. The researcher asked her what made this style different from the other styles. She responded with, “By having a motivational leadership style, the staff and students are overall happy. If we want our people to grow, we must motivate them to do so. If we practice negativity, then our

people will also be negative. So, why not practice a leadership style that fits everyone's style."

Principal 5 was also unfamiliar with succession planning. When she was questioned about it, she responded with, "What's that?" The researcher did not want to be leading, but did give her an abbreviated definition, from research. She then responded with, "I feel that's what the district uses." Principal 5 was further asked if she had ever heard of succession planning mentioned inside or outside of the school district. Her response was, "No."

#### *Principal 6*

Principal 6 currently serves as the first-year principal of an elementary school (grades kindergarten through sixth grade) in Southern Mississippi. She is a 49-year-old, Caucasian female. She has 22 years of experience in education. The titles she has had include: fifth-grade teacher, librarian, and assistant principal. Her highest degree earned is a Master's, and she completed a one-year internship within the district.

Prior to her principalship, she served as an assistant principal for three years. During these three years, she stated that she ran the school. When the researcher asked her to explain her answer further, she responded with,

I was the principal for three years, but my title remained as assistant principal. Meaning, I worked under the leadership of a principal who was very difficult to work for. She absolutely did nothing. She would just sit in her office. We were together eight hours of the day, but I never saw her. She did not mentor me like she should have. Therefore, I had to make mistakes, and learn on my own. Throughout my tenure as an assistant principal, I almost quit three times.

However, through prayer and support from my family and friends, I stuck with it.

Luckily, the principalship became available, and I was chosen for the position.

When principal 6 was questioned about her leadership style, she answered with instructional leadership. She told the researcher that all principals should practice this leadership style, as it is proven to be successful. Principal 6 advised the researcher that there is much research on this style, and that when she completed her administrative degree, this style was thoroughly discussed in all classes.

Principal 6 was familiar with succession planning. She asked the researcher if it was a process used to select current assistant principals for principal positions. Principal 6 further explained that she was a member of succession planning with the following detailed response,

At the end of last school year, the assistant superintendent and superintendent walked into my office. The assistant superintendent asked me how I liked being an assistant principal. I told him that I enjoyed it, but there were days that were very challenging. The assistant superintendent then paused, and the superintendent began talking. The superintendent then asked if I was interested in becoming the school's next principal the following school year. Of course, I thanked him and I advised he and the assistant superintendent that I would need 24 hours to decide. Well, I couldn't wait until 24 hours, so I e-mailed both of them and said yes.

Principal 6 was asked about her future plans within the district. She responded with, "I'm going to be retiring in a few years, but I am interested in pursuing a consulting position." The researcher asked if she were interested in consulting first-year principals,

and she said, “Yes.” She further stated that she would be interested in assisting first-year principals with the challenges ahead.

#### *Assistant Superintendent 1*

Assistant superintendent 1 currently serves as the assistant superintendent of a public school district in Southern Mississippi. She is a 61-year-old, Caucasian female and is also the supervisor of two other participants (Principals 1-2). Assistant superintendent 1 holds a Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Administration and has over 35 years of experience (elementary teacher, assistant principal, and principal) in the educational sector. She currently supervises 12 assistant principals and five principals. Additionally, she serves as an adjunct professor in the area of educational leadership at a local university.

When asked why principals 1 and 2 were chosen as principals, she provided the following feedback.

#### *Principal 1*

Principal 1 was chosen due to her dedication as a leader while in the teaching role. Yes, she didn’t have to accept the additional responsibilities without being compensated, but she did. She did a fantastic job in leadership roles, including her tenure as an assistant principal. Her stakeholders liked and listened to her. She is a genuine person; however, don’t let her low profile convince you otherwise. She is a true leader.

#### *Principal 2*

Principal 2 was chosen due to his charismatic personality and knowledge of leadership. He came to the district with glowing recommendations, including

those by his former superiors, co-workers, and even educational leadership professors. He is also a people person. He truly cares about what people think of him. His moto of “I want everyone to be happy” goes far. He never says no, and he embraces his people.

Assistant superintendent 1 was very familiar with succession planning. However, she stated that she and the superintendent do not describe it as succession planning. Rather, they address it as a process in order to recruit current assistant principals (within the district) for upcoming principal positions.

Assistant superintendent 1 was also questioned about hiring internal versus external individuals for principalship positions. Her response was,

While our district is always looking for the best candidates to fill principalship positions, we tend to grow our own. Meaning, if we have an assistant principal who exhibits skilled qualifications and has a positive rapport with stakeholders, then we will give that candidate preferential treatment. However, if there is an external candidate who also exhibits the same qualifications, then we will also interview that candidate. At that time, we will select the candidate who scored the highest points through an interview scoring form.

#### *Assistant Superintendent 2*

Assistant superintendent 2 currently serves as the assistant superintendent/personnel director for a coastal public school district in Southern Mississippi. He has 35 years in the educational sector. Prior to becoming an assistant superintendent, he served as an assistant principal for two years and a principal for 11



years. The remainder of his tenure has been in his current position. Additionally, his highest degree earned is a Master's.

Assistant superintendent 2 currently supervises all assistant principals, principals, and two directors within the school district. He stated that he works closely with these individuals to ensure instruction is occurring, and most importantly, that it is effective.

As to assistant superintendent 2's knowledge of succession planning, he was unaware of succession planning, but then later agreed that his school district did take part in the process. For clarification purposes, his response was,

Oh, succession planning is what we (he and the superintendent) refer to as a process of placing our assistant principals into principal positions. However, the process begins with our instructional literacy coaches. In order to be a principal within this district, the individual must have served as an instructional literacy coach and/or assistant principal before stepping into the principal position.

In order for the researcher and readers to understand, the researcher asked for a definition of an instructional literacy coach. From the information collected, this individual observes teachers and models reading lessons. In other words, this individual serves as a third assistant principal, but without the title and pay raise.

Assistant superintendent 2 never referred to succession planning as a program, but rather a reoccurring process. He was further asked about external individuals. However, he never directly answered the researcher about hiring external individuals for principal positions.

### *Assistant Superintendent 3*

Assistant superintendent 3 currently serves as the assistant superintendent of a public school district in Southern Mississippi. He is also the supervisor to two of the participants (Principal 4 and 6). He has 36 years in the educational sector, and his highest degree earned is a Master's. Something unique about him is that he went from a third-grade teacher to an assistant superintendent. Normally, an individual has to go through stages within educational administration, i.e., teacher, assistant principal, principal, and then assistant superintendent.

When asked why principal 6 was chosen for the principalship, he responded with, Principal 6 ran a school as an assistant principal. Even though a principal was in the building, that principal did not perform as expected. I can say that the principal is no longer employed, and [Principal 6] is doing a fantastic job as a first-year principal. She is competent about the curriculum and instruction, is a people person, and never says 'no' to anything. The superintendent and I are happy that we chose her as principal.

When asked why principal 4 was chosen for the principalship, he responded with, Principal 4 is a competent individual. With more than 23 years of experience in education, the superintendent and I could not have thought of a better fit. I personally knew his parents, and he is a great person. I also knew that he would do well with the community. He continues to excel in the principalship, and I am eager to see all the great things I know he will do.

When assistant superintendent 3 was asked about succession planning, he said, "What's that?" The researcher had to explain a brief definition of succession planning in

order to not be leading, but to give enough of information in order to collect data.

However, once the definition was given, assistant superintendent 3 stated that he and the superintendent practice succession planning. However, they refer to succession planning as a process. The process pertains to selecting internal assistant principals and placing them in principal positions.

### *Superintendent 1*

Superintendent 1 currently serves as the superintendent for a public school district in Southern Mississippi. He is also the supervisor of one participant (principal 3). His highest degree earned is a Master's, and he currently supervises four principals, one career and technical director, and of course, principal 3.

When asked why principal 3 was chosen for the principalship, he responded with,

Principal 3 is a fine young lady. My assistant superintendent and I knew from day one that she would make a great leader. As the current superintendent, I am highly visible. I knew that after watching and talking with principal 3 many times, she would be great with the community. Not only do the community love her, her staff and students do as well. She has a way of loving and accepting everyone, no matter what their pasts have been. I am honored to serve as her superintendent.

Superintendent 1 also mentioned that principal 3 practice instructional leadership, and that's the leader that he was looking for in order to secure the principalship.

Superintendent 1 had knowledge of succession planning, but also referred to it as a process. The researcher further questioned superintendent 1 about the process. Specifically, the researcher wanted to know how succession planning worked with

external individuals (i.e., assistant principals/principals who worked out of district).

Similar to assistant superintendent 3's answer, superintendent 1 also believed in hiring internal individuals first.

Superintendent 1 believes that in order for an individual to be given a principal position within his district, the individual must have either been an instructional literacy coach and/or assistant principal. When the researcher further asked him why an individual needed to have this experience, he responded with, "The reason why the individual needs to be an instructional literacy coach and/or assistant principal pertains to their district knowledge of the people, policies, and procedures."

#### Relevant Themes Found Regarding Succession Planning

##### *Succession Planning – What's that?*

When the researcher asked first-year principals about their knowledge of succession planning, many of the participants had never heard of those two words. In fact, those participants asked the researcher to define what it meant. However, when the researcher defined the definition of succession planning (from the literature review), each one stated that their district did practice succession planning. However, the researcher did not want to lead the participants. Therefore, the researcher was very cautious and only quoted the succession planning definition (solely based on research).

According to assistant superintendent 1,

We don't call our process for selecting principal's succession planning. We simply call it a process. We (myself, the other assistant superintendent, and superintendent) ask ourselves which person is ready for an upcoming principal's

position. Even though we are all very busy, we are in close contact with our assistant principals, as well as being highly visible in all of the district's schools. Additionally, assistant superintendent 1 mentioned that succession planning is a process of identifying the district's own internal individuals.

#### *Grooming One's Own*

When the researcher asked the participants about their knowledge of succession planning, four out of ten participants stated that succession planning pertains to *grooming one's own (internal individual) to become the next principal*. Specifically, these participants stated that internal individuals always have first choice in principalship positions rather than external ones. Further, the researcher asked these participants to define 'internal individuals.' The definition was as follows: internal individuals are assistant principals within the district, who have a minimum of three years' experience.

According to principal 3, "Succession planning is a method used to support one's own to secure a principal's position. This method either occurs early on (or once the assistant superintendent/superintendent has learned that a former principal is leaving)." Principal 5 concurred with principal 3 by stating, "I've heard of a succession planning program, and I believe that the true meaning is to groom a person to be the next leader when district personnel have learned that the current leader will be retiring for the upcoming year." Another theme that was found pertained to a leadership pipeline.

#### *A Leadership Pipeline: A Process*

According to principal 1, "Succession planning is merely a leadership pipeline. There is not anything written down – it is more a process than on paper. I do believe,

however, that assistant superintendents and/or superintendents know who (in their district) will be promoted to a principal's position."

Principal 1 further explained that her assistant superintendent and superintendent conduct SIT (School Instructional Team) meetings monthly. Members of these meetings are assistant superintendents, assistant principals, and principals. In these meetings, these members work closely together to review teacher observations, curriculum, instruction, and discuss the needed changes for improvement. Therefore, principal 1 stated that the assistant superintendent and superintendent listen closely and give feedback. She further stated that the meetings were excellent opportunities to select the next principals.

*From Instructional Literacy Coaches (Lead Teachers) to Principals*

All participants indicated that in order for principals to secure positions, they either need to be an instructional literacy coach or assistant principal within the district for a minimum of three years. A few years ago, according to superintendent 1, the title of lead teacher was replaced with instructional literacy coach. Superintendent 1 further stated, "The position is the same; the name just changed." According to assistant superintendent 2, "Instructional literacy coaches observe teachers and model lessons. They also hold professional development and facilitate teacher leaders to ensure that instruction is being implemented effectively."

According to assistant superintendent 3, an instructional literacy coach was referred to as the teacher-in-charge. However, this position was not full-time. Rather, the teacher-in-charge was a classroom teacher who then worked for a minimum of two to three hours in the office, daily.

The researcher asked what this person did while in the office. Assistant superintendent 3 responded with, “The teacher-in-charge assisted with school discipline, evaluated lesson plans, conducted teacher observations, and assisted in identifying students who had learning disabilities (also known as child find/teacher support team). However, in assistant superintendent 3’s district, this position no longer exists. Currently, all assistant principals have these duties, in addition to others. According to assistant superintendent 3 and superintendent 1, in order to apply/qualify for assistant principal positions, the applicant must have been an instructional literacy coach for a minimum of three years. Then, those assistant principals tend to be next in line for the principalship.

#### *The Presence/Absence of Instructional Literacy Coaches*

The data collected indicated that positions for literacy coaches do not exist in all districts. Therefore, the researcher asked specific questions to the assistant superintendents and superintendent as to the qualifications required for the principalship. Each answer was similar, and the responses all concluded with, “If the individual being considered does not have an instructional literacy coaching background, and is an assistant principal, then he/she will still be promoted to a principal position.”

In one school district, one assistant superintendent stated that instructional literacy coaches do not exist. He responded with, “Once an internal teacher has earned a degree in administration (with the appropriate licensure), the teacher will be given preferential treatment for current/upcoming assistant principal positions.”

### *Three Years of Experience – A Minimum Preference/Requirement for the Principalship*

Nine out of 10 participants had a minimum of three years of experience working as an assistant principal prior to being hired into the principalship. In order for the researcher to understand the requirement, further questions were addressed to these participants. Specifically, the researcher wanted to know if the district required or preferred individuals to have served for a defined number of years prior to appointment. The response from assistant superintendent 2 answered the question, but with speculation. His response was,

The district prefers individuals who have at least three years of experience either as an instructional literacy coach, assistant principal, and/or both. The superintendent and myself believe that the individual will exceed his/her expectations due to the knowledge learned within three years.

During data collection, the researcher had the opportunity to view a job posting within the district where superintendent 2 was employed a few years ago. The posting was aligned with assistant superintendent's response. Additionally, this position was posted on the district's website, under the human resource directory. However, if external individuals applied for this posting, would he/she possibly be given an interview and/or hired? Presently, that answer remains unknown.

### *Good Ole' Boy System*

The assistant superintendents and superintendent interviewed were solely interested in only hiring internal individuals. This, however, poses an issue with external individuals. In order to further understand this issue, the researcher questioned assistant superintendent 1 about hiring external individuals. As noted earlier, her response clearly



stated that she and the superintendent preferred to select internal individuals first. From the researcher's perspective, external individuals who are well-versed in administration, communication, procedures/policies, etc., may never be given the chance to attain a principalship role. Additionally, this theme is titled Good Ole' Boy System because this is the language the assistant superintendents and superintendents used, however, this does not mean that these assistant superintendents and superintendent interviewed solely hired male principals. Therefore, female principals were also included within this theme.

### *Instructional Leadership*

The research participants demonstrated a strong interest regarding instructional leadership. Most first-year principals either had practiced or currently practice instructional leadership. According to superintendent 1, "Instructional leadership is the ticket to success. Without it, teachers will not teach effectively, and students will not succeed. Leaders must practice this style and use it daily." According to assistant superintendent 3, "As a current assistant superintendent, I use instructional leadership, and I expect my assistant principals and principals to use this style. I do have one assistant principal who is very strong in instructional leadership, and he submits his evaluations weekly to me. I then call him and review the observations with him. In addition, his test scores are rising."

From the data collection, the majority of first-year principals use instructional leadership. In almost every interview conducted, instructional leadership was a part of the dialogue, especially with principal 3. As noted earlier, principal 3 practices instructional leadership daily, and believes that she was a participant of succession planning due to practicing this style. Principal 3 stated that there is much research on

instructional leadership, and it is what district-level administration (directors, assistant superintendents, superintendents) want to see when they visit schools. Further, she stated that her district-level administrators mention that instructional leadership should be used in order for the purposes of engaging students in learning. For example, instructional leadership includes effective teaching. In order to know if effective teaching is going on, teacher evaluations must be conducted. That's why principal 3 conducts weekly teacher evaluations. In addition, according to principal 3, instructional leadership has been proven to raise students' test scores. Another related style pertains to situational leadership.

#### *Situational Leadership*

As noted earlier, principal 1 had to use situational leadership due to a tornado that destroyed her school. It was then when she realized that she had to use the style, and she was successful. Another participant also uses situational leadership. Principal 4 stated, "My assistant principal and I use situational leadership daily. We handle all matters differently. Things happen, and sometimes, it is out of our control. Therefore, we must collaborate and handle the matters accordingly."

The researcher also asked if principal 4 believed if his district-level administration used situational leadership. His answer was "Yes and No." When asked to explain further, his response was,

"I believe the majority of the leadership in the district office is instructional leadership. However, there have been times when situational leadership was used. I can recall a time when one of my students had a BB gun in his bookbag. According to district protocol, I had to inform the assistant superintendent of

the situation. The assistant superintendent immediately came to my school and questioned the student. After an extensive interview process, the assistant superintendent and I were able to determine that his brother placed the BB gun in his bookbag the night before. Therefore, the assistant superintendent had to make a very important decision – the student either had to be suspended for a certain number of days or be expelled from school (for the remainder of the school year). Since the issue involved the student’s brother, the assistant superintendent chose the suspension (more lenient than expulsion). Therefore, I believe that the assistant superintendent used situational leadership in order to make an informed decision.”

#### Succession Planning Experiences

Once the researcher defined succession planning during data collection, all participants were able to discuss their succession planning experiences. As noted earlier, there was difficulty with some participants’ comprehension of succession planning. According to principal 1 and 3, they attended SIT meetings (School Instructional Team) when they were assistant principals. They believed that their relationships were built with their respective assistant superintendent and/or superintendent, which eventually led to their principalships. Superintendent 1 stated that instructional literacy coaches learned the knowledge needed in order to become assistant principals within his school district. He further stated that once they were assistant principals for at least three years, they were ready for their principalships.

Out of the ten participants interviewed, one participant had a negative experience through succession planning. As noted earlier within this chapter, principal 6 had a

conflict with her former supervisor. Principal 6 responded with, “I wanted to quit, and I was completely shocked when my supervisor promoted me to principal.” For clarity purposes, the researcher asked principal 6 if she had an issue with succession planning. She responded with, “It would have been nice if my supervisors had prepared me ahead of time, rather than waiting until my boss (former principal) retired.” At the same time, the researcher learned that this negative could have been turned into a positive, due to her promotion, through further questioning.

From the beginning of the interview with principal 6, the researcher quickly determined that principal 6 was happy about being promoted to the principalship. However, in the three years she served as an assistant principal, she had many duties, and felt like the principal (former supervisor) should have been splitting the duties with her. Meanwhile, principal 6 felt like her district-level administration team (assistant superintendent/superintendent) should have known about what occurred. However, she feared that if she told them, they may have called a meeting between her and her former supervisor. Hence, principal 6 did not want this meeting to occur.

Other participants (principals) talked about not knowing if they would be promoted to the principalship. Specifically, principal 4 thought that he would retire as an educator/football coach. However, he was very surprised when he received a principalship position. During principal 4’s interview, the researcher asked him about what qualities did he think he exhibited that eventually led him to the principalship. His response was as follows,

I am a yes-man. I have always done what I was told to do without any reservations. I was raised with respect, and I will always respect others.

However, I do believe that respect was merely a component of the promotion.

My love for the students is strong. As a former coach, I pushed my athletes to always do their best, and that's the way I treated all students. Again, I am very proud that I was promoted, and I made a vow to the assistant superintendent and superintendent that I would not never let them down.

From the data collection, the researcher was able to determine that a succession plan was not a policy on paper. Rather, succession planning is a verbal process. As noted earlier, in one particular school district, if a teacher desires to be a principal, he/she must follow these steps in order: (a) teacher, (b) teacher-in-charge/lead teacher/instructional literacy coach, (c) assistant principal, and (d) principal. In another district, the teacher-in-charge/lead teacher/instructional literacy coach position is not available. Therefore, if a teacher does a good job at the building level and earns an administrative degree, then he/she may be promoted to an assistant principal's position. In turn, this process is succession planning.

### Support(s) During the Principalship

Various supports are provided to principals including consultants, directors, professional development available via the Mississippi Department of Education, post-secondary education, and assistant superintendents.

#### *Consultants*

All first-year principals interviewed were provided the services of an educational consultant during their first year of the principalship. The reason, according to assistant

superintendent 3, is to provide the support when district-level administration is not available to meet their needs. Specifically, according to principal 6, her consultant reviewed test scores with her for a total of six times. Her consultant taught her how to gain a snapshot of her scores in order for comprehension. She was then able to meet with her teachers to review the data. At the same time, she felt confident in doing so. Additionally, the researcher asked her how she would have felt without the consultant's support. She responded with, "I would not have felt comfortable reviewing the scores with my teachers without his support."

According to assistant superintendent 1, she requires SIT meetings with her principals. She was also asked if consultants were used in her district. She said yes, but also added that all district-level administration is required to provide additional support to first-year principals.

### *Directors*

According to assistant superintendent 1, first-year principals are suggested to seek assistance from district-level directors. For example, in most districts, there are curriculum directors, support services directors, etc. In assistant superintendent 1's district, there are two curriculum directors (one elementary, one secondary). These directors not only ensure that the curriculum is being implemented across the schools, but also support all principals in the district.

For example, according to assistant superintendent 1, one first-year principal was not skilled on the new teacher evaluation rubric (Professional Growth System, PGS). This individual called assistant superintendent 1, and was redirected to contact the

secondary curriculum director for assistance. The curriculum director met with the first-year principal many times until the principal fully understood how to evaluate teachers.

Not only do curriculum directors assist with problems, they also meet monthly (or more) with all principals to ensure that principals are made aware of new school policies and procedures. According to assistant superintendent 2, the purpose of these meetings is to not only inform principals, but to also answer questions while everyone is in the same room. According to assistant superintendent 2, this is an excellent time for collaboration among these stakeholders.

#### *Mississippi Department of Education (MDE)*

According to superintendent 1, Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) offers several professional development (PD) workshops on the principalship. Meaning, first-year principals can register on MDE for ‘free’ workshops on the new teacher evaluation rubric (PGS), ethical decisions for principals, ESSA (Every Student Succeeds Act), new guidelines for English Learners (ELs), and other topics.

Superintendent 1 wanted the researcher to understand that he would be more than willing to assist his first-year principal (including others) with questions; however, he also informs his first-year principal about free PD opportunities. He further responded with, “I want to place all that I can in her toolbox in order for her to succeed.”

#### *Post-Secondary Education*

During the interview with superintendent 1, post-secondary education was also mentioned. According to superintendent 1,

I encourage all district employees to return to post-secondary education to receive updated training on school subjects. I want my assistant principals and principals

to enroll in college courses such as curriculum, instructional leadership, the role of the principal, cooperative learning, etc. Even if their highest degree earned is a Doctorate, I still would like them to stay informed. As you may know, people get comfortable, and I would hate to see a veteran principal get in this mentality and not be informed about the latest changes in curriculum/instruction.

#### *Assistant Superintendents*

According to all assistant superintendents interviewed, first-year principals are urged to seek assistance from their respective assistant superintendent(s). According to assistant superintendent 2, “First-year principals are more than welcome to call/e-mail their superintendents with questions and/or concerns; however, it is strongly recommended that assistance come from assistant superintendents first. The reason – superintendents are often very busy and should only be called as a last resort.”

During the interview with assistant superintendent 2, the researcher learned that assistant superintendent 2 does two visits in all of the schools monthly. Assistant superintendent 2 walks in the buildings, asks for the assistant principals and/or principals to walk with him, observes all teachers (2 minutes or less), and then walks back to the assistant principals’ and/or principals’ offices to discuss what was observed. According to assistant superintendent 2, this time is considered a perfect opportunity for collaboration about several different topics. For example, the topics typically range from the positives and negatives of the teacher evaluations to the curriculum.

#### *Summary*

From day one in data collection, the researcher realized that the terminology of succession planning was not well-known to the majority of the participants. Several



participants asked the researcher to define succession planning. However, once it was defined, then the majority of the participants stated that their district did practice succession planning, but did not realize that it was called succession planning. At one point, one participant (assistant superintendent 3) stated “I’ve never heard of succession planning – what is that.” Further, two participants (assistant superintendent 1 and superintendent 1) knew exactly what succession planning was, but was quick to say that they do not address the method as succession planning, but rather a process. However, that process virtually meant the same thing as succession planning, once described by the two participants.

From a researcher’s perspective, the researcher initially thought that all first-year principals would state that they practice instructional leadership. However, two to three of the participants stated that they practice motivational and inspirational leadership. Through further questioning with these participants, the leadership styles mean the same thing. It is speculated that one reason these participants were hired into principalship positions was simply by their chosen leadership styles.

Throughout data collection, the research deliberately asked the assistant superintendents and superintendent their opinions of hiring external individuals for principalship positions. All participants responded, but superintendent 1’s answer clearly stated that he would give his internal individuals preferential treatment for principalship positions. At the same time, this poses an issue regarding job postings for external individuals. According to a human resource director in an educational sector (not interviewed and a friend of the researcher), all school districts are required by law to

place all job postings, as well as including opening and closing dates. In addition, the duration of the job posting must be a minimum of 7 days.

## CHAPTER V – DISCUSSION

### Introduction

The purpose of the study was to explore and describe the succession planning process when used for first-year, P-12 principals. This study also sought information regarding how transparent the succession planning process was, how widespread succession planning was, and whether it was a genuine process or merely a formality.

Within this chapter, the researcher explained how the findings related to the current literature. The researcher also introduced new ideas not found in the current literature. In addition, this information may provide public school district personnel and other readers the information needed in order to introduce and/or comprehend the succession planning program within P-12 public school districts.

### Findings Relative to the Current Literature

The researcher agreed with the following definition of succession planning, as defined by Peter-Hawkins, Reed, and Kingsberry (2017): an ‘intentional process’ undertaken within a school district to allow for a smooth transition to benefit the incoming principal. Throughout data collection, it was evident that some of the first-year principals knew that they were a product of succession planning. Specifically, assistant superintendent 1 stated that she and her superintendent (not interviewed) ‘intentionally’ selected assistant principals who would excel in the principalship.

As noted in chapter four, the themes, Grooming One’s Own, A Leadership Pipeline: A Process, and Good Ole’ Boy System, quickly came to mind when the researcher read Peter-Hawkins, Reed, and Kingsberry’s (2017) definition of succession planning after data analysis. Specifically, assistant superintendents 1-3 and

superintendent 1 agreed that they would rather invest in their own assistant principals rather than external assistant principals, which translated to insider vs. outsider first-year principals' research, noted in chapter two.

According to Carlson (1962), insiders (assistant principals promoted to principals within a school district) are beneficial for continued growth and the development of a school. According to superintendent 1, he prefers to hire insiders over outsiders (assistant principals promoted to principals outside a school district). However, at the same time, Carlson (1962) also noted that insiders may cause problems within a school and/or district due to their relationships with individuals within a school district. Additionally, the researcher believed that assistant superintendent 2 disagreed with Carlson's notation about how insiders could cause problems within the district, because he, too, would only hire outsiders as a last resort.

According to all assistant superintendents and the superintendent interviewed, they relied on the previous principals to assist in the selection of the new principals (as noted by Pounder & Crow, 2005). Further, superintendent 1 stated that succession planning must be a part of both school-wide and district-wide plans. In addition, superintendent 1's feedback was imperative within the succession planning process.

As noted by Papa (2007), succession planning occurs in a three-stage process: pre-succession, succession, and post-succession. During data collection, the researcher realized that some of the first-year principals engaged in the pre-succession and succession stages. For example, the research noted that during the pre-succession stage, a principal's traits and attributes are matched within the organizational structure (Papa, 2007). Once the interviews were completed with assistant superintendents 1-3 and

superintendent 1, it was apparent that these district-level administrators had already matched first-year principals' traits and attributes to their principalship positions. Further, in the succession stage, the district-level administrators then moved selected assistant principals to principalship positions. Unfortunately, since interviews only occurred once, the researcher was not able to determine the post-succession stage.

The researcher agreed with Fink and Brayman (2006) regarding that all school districts should participate in succession planning. However, succession planning must be planned carefully (as suggested by Hargreaves, 2005). Superintendent 1 talked extensively about this matter, and further stated, "In order to recruit assistant principals into principal positions, my assistant superintendent and I must select individuals carefully, meaning that we need to know their strengths and weaknesses before we move them into principalship positions."

Assistant superintendent 1 and superintendent 1 also discussed the need for their first-year principal's to be assigned a mentor and professional development (PD). According to these individuals,

All first-year principals must receive a mentor, especially during their first year in the principalship. There will be numerous questions about procedures, curriculum, instruction, discipline, teacher evaluations, and most importantly, evaluating test scores. The purpose of a mentor is to ensure that first-year principals understand all components listed above. Next, these principals must engage in PD. PD is needed in order to introduce new school-wide policies and procedures to these individuals.

As noted in chapter four, there was a strong allegiance among the participants with the current/former practices of instructional leadership. As mentioned by assistant superintendent 1, “All first-year principals must practice instructional leadership. Without it, teachers and students will not be successful in meeting the needs of high-stakes instruction and testing.”

There is much research on instructional leadership; however, some authors have listed advantages and disadvantages, or pros and cons, associated with this leadership style. Specifically, a recent con listed pertained to principals not following their school-wide mission and vision, because they are solely relying on test scores. Similarly, principals 4 and 6 have used instructional leadership in the past, but currently practice situational leadership.

Both first-year principals encountered several situations that had to be dealt with differently including a tornado that badly damage a school building and chose to use situational leadership rather than instructional leadership. As defined by Barbour (2013), situational leadership means that there is no best way to lead/manage.

The researcher also agreed that succession planning issues do exists. As noted by Friedman (1986), succession planning can be a messy process. In Fink and Brayman’s (2006) beliefs about succession planning issues, one of the four factors listed pertained that some succession plans are ethically questionable, unplanned, and/or arbitrary. During data collection, especially with the three assistant superintendents and one superintendent interviewed, the researcher deliberately asked these individuals if succession planning was a process or formality. No one stated that succession planning was a formality. Rather, the individuals stated that succession planning was a ‘process.’

However, there is no written plan or policy regarding the process. The researcher feels that the assistant superintendent and superintendent automatically choose who they want to be hired into the principalship (at an early stage). With this belief, succession planning is questionable and is possibly arbitrary. Should all succession plans include insider principals only, or should succession plans also involve outsiders? Those questions remain unanswered, due to the assistant superintendents and superintendent stating that they would only hire outsiders as a last resort.

#### New Findings Not Listed in the Current Literature

Surprisingly, the researcher was shocked to discover that some of the participants (specifically assistant superintendent 3) did not know what succession planning was until the researcher read a definition (from chapter two). That is why the theme, Succession Planning – What’s that? was created. As noted in chapter four, assistant superintendent 3 said, “What is succession planning?” It was at that time when the researcher realized that knowledge of the research regarding succession planning was lacking. Additionally, this is the reason why the researcher chose this topic. However, the researcher assumed that all participants, especially assistant superintendents/superintendents would know what succession planning was all about.

According to principal 1, “The terminology of succession planning is not used. What you do hear is a process of selecting current assistant principals to replace retiring principals.” In addition, prior to the researcher writing the dissertation, no research was found regarding succession planning and first-year principals. There was literature on first-year principals, but not both topics combined.

Many of the participants talked about past instructional literacy coach (ILC)/lead teacher (LT) positions, which is relevant to the theme, *From Instructional Literacy Coaches to Principals*. Specifically, if these positions were available in their respective districts, their assistant superintendents and/or superintendents preferred them to have been an ILC/LT before moving into the principalship. When asked why this position was preferred, many participants stated that within this position, an individual has the opportunity to learn about curriculum, instruction, and evaluating students' test scores. Once the ILC/LT has had this experience, he/she could apply for an assistant principal's position, then eventually leading to a principal's position.

However, according to assistant superintendents 2-3 and superintendent 1, the individual should be in the ILC/LT position for a total of three years before becoming an assistant principal/principal. When further questioned about this requirement/preference, superintendent 1 said, "The first-year principal may not be successful due to a lack of knowledge in curriculum, instruction, and test score evaluations."

Lastly, a commonality was found regarding the theme, *Three Years of Experience*. Prior to data collection and analysis, the researcher did some further research pertaining to 'available' principalship positions across Mississippi public schools. The researcher located some principalship positions 'requiring' a minimum of at least three years of experience as an assistant principal. Other job postings listed the same notation, but replaced 'requirement' with a 'preference.'

Therefore, a question exists as to whether or not principalships should require or prefer that first-year principals should have served in assistant principal position for at least three years. However, according to principal 1, she did not serve as an assistant



principal for at least three years. In fact, she didn't serve as an assistant principal at all. Rather, she went from a student services coordinator to a first-year principal.

### Delimitations

There were delimitations within this study. First, only first-year principals, their assistant superintendents, and/or superintendents were interviewed. Second, incoming first-year principals were not interviewed. For example, the researcher knew of one current assistant principal who had already been hired to be a principal for the upcoming school year. Third, personnel, such as curriculum directors, special education directors, support service directors, assessment directors, and other roles (within the respective districts) were also not interviewed. Fourth, first-year principals, out-of-state, were not included. Lastly, first-year principals working in private/charter schools were not interviewed.

### Recommendations for Policy and Practice

Given the extensive research on succession planning reviewed in chapter 2 and findings of this study, the researcher agrees with Fink and Brayman (2006) by suggesting that school districts use succession planning in order to hire first-year principals. Succession planning is about ensuring that the next set of leaders is trained and poised to take on leadership responsibilities when needed (Beaulieu, n.d.). Although some school district personnel are unaware of this plan, the findings may be beneficial in order for comprehension purposes.

### Recommendations for Future Research

The researcher believes that the following areas should be researched: (a) second-year principals who may have participated in succession planning, (b) 'incoming' first-

year principals who were hired for the upcoming school year, and (c) input from district-level directors. Since the study only included first-year principals, the researcher believes that second-year principals, who may have participated in succession planning be included for future research. By soliciting this group's feedback, it may be beneficial to inquire about their progress. In other words, how is the second-year doing with curriculum, testing data, discipline, school budget, community relations, etc.?

As noted earlier, the researcher knew of one current assistant principal who had been hired as a principal for the upcoming school year. For future research, this individual's input may have been prudent, as she was a succession plan candidate. Finally, it may be beneficial to solicit feedback from district-level directors who may have been involved in succession planning. These directors may or may not be curriculum directors, assessment directors, special education (exceptional education) directors, gifted directors, technology directors, federal program directors, etc.

### Summary

The researcher learned early on that succession planning is conducted, but it is a process – not a formal policy. This study sought to explore how widespread succession planning may be. Through data collection, the researcher found that succession planning is widespread throughout many schools. However, the terminology (succession planning) may or may not be used. Specifically, some assistant superintendents and/or superintendents do not refer to the process as succession planning. They simply refer to it as a 'process.'

The researcher also learned that internal candidates, i.e., current assistant principals within their school districts, are most often promoted to principal positions

(aka, principalship). According to several participants, it is uncommon for external candidates, i.e., assistant principals/principals employed outside of the school district, to secure principal positions.

Lastly, the study was centered through the situational/contingency leadership theories; however, the chosen leadership style to have pertains to instructional leadership. According to the participants (primarily consisting of assistant superintendents and the superintendent), “If you don’t practice instructional leadership, you will most likely not secure a principal’s position.”

## APPENDIX A – INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

### APPENDIX A

#### Interview Questions for First-Year Principals

1. Please answer the following questions:
  - a. Age?
  - b. Gender?
  - c. Race?
  - d. How many years did you teach public school?
2. What is your current position? How long have you been in this position?
3. What was your previous position? How long did you hold this position?
4. Was your previous position within this building or district?
5. What was the duration of your previous position?
6. Did you complete an administrative internship within this building and/or district?
7. What degrees and certifications do you have?
8. Please describe the career path that has led you to this position.
9. Were you influenced or mentored during your pathway to leadership? If so, by what or whom?
10. In what ways did your principal support you? If so, how?
11. In what ways did you receive support from the assistant superintendent and/or superintendent?
12. How did you learn that you were going to be a principal within this building and/or district?
13. Please describe the ways in which the district prepared you to assume a leadership position in your school or district?
  - a. What elements did your preparation include? (leadership development, budget knowledge, discipline knowledge, creating a school vision, accountability, committee work, parental involvement, community involvement, etc.)
  - b. Who was being prepared with you?
  - c. How long did the preparation take?
  - d. Who provided the training and preparation?
14. Please tell me what you know about succession planning (or) a succession planning program?
15. What is your definition of a succession planning program?
16. What components should it include?
17. How did you learn that you would be participating in a succession planning program?
18. If answered YES to Q11, what were the advantages, if any, of the succession planning program?
19. If answered YES to Q11, what were the disadvantages, if any, of the succession planning program?
20. Is there anything that I didn't ask you that would help me better understand succession planning?

### Interview Questions for First-Year Principals' Assistant Superintendents/Superintendents

1. Please answer the following questions:
  - a. Age?
  - b. Gender?
  - c. Race?
  - d. How many years did you teach public school?
  - e. How many years were you an assistant principal?
  - f. How many years were you a principal/assistant superintendent?
2. What is your current position? Duration?
3. Which principal or principals do you supervise?
4. How does your district prepare individuals to assume the leadership role of principal?
  - a. How are individuals selected to participate in principal preparation?
  - b. Is there a formal program?
  - c. What objectives does the preparation attempt to accomplish?
  - d. What elements does the preparation address? (leadership development, budget knowledge, discipline knowledge, creating a school vision, accountability, committee work, parental involvement, community involvement, etc.)
  - e. How long does the preparation take?
  - f. What resources are invested in principal preparation (time, money, space, print materials, development of training exercises/simulations/etc.)?
  - g. How many people are prepared at the same time?
  - h. How often does the preparation take place?
  - i. Who is involved in providing the preparation?
  - j. How do you assess candidate's learning?
  - k. How do you evaluate candidate's readiness to assume a principalship?
  - l. How do you evaluate the program's effectiveness?
5. What is your definition of a succession planning program?
6. What objectives should it strive to meet?
7. What components should it include?
8. Does your district participate in a succession planning program?
9. If so, what are the program's objectives?
10. What are the program's components?
11. Do you have a written succession planning program, or does it solely rely on the candidate's performance and/or their principal's feedback?
12. At what point do you begin a succession planning program with a candidate?
13. What makes a candidate stand out?
14. What supports do you put in place to successfully follow through the succession planning program?
15. What are the advantages, if any, of a candidate completing a succession planning program?
16. What are the disadvantages, if any, of a candidate completing a succession planning program?
17. Is there anything that I didn't ask you that would help me better understand succession planning?

## APPENDIX B – IRB Approval Letter



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI

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**INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD**

118 College Drive #5147 | Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001

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**NOTICE OF COMMITTEE ACTION**

The project has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 26, 111), Department of Health and Human Services (45 CFR Part 46), and university guidelines to ensure adherence to the following criteria:

- The risks to subjects are minimized.
- The risks to subjects are reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits.
- The selection of subjects is equitable.
- Informed consent is adequate and appropriately documented.
- Where appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of the subjects.
- Where appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of all data.
- Appropriate additional safeguards have been included to protect vulnerable subjects.
- Any unanticipated, serious, or continuing problems encountered regarding risks to subjects must be reported immediately, but not later than 10 days following the event. This should be reported to the IRB Office via the "Adverse Effect Report Form".
- If approved, the maximum period of approval is limited to twelve months.  
Projects that exceed this period must submit an application for renewal or continuation.

PROTOCOL NUMBER: 18041101

PROJECT TITLE: Succession Planning for First-Year, P-12 Principals

PROJECT TYPE: Doctoral Dissertation

RESEARCHER(S): Brannon Johnson

COLLEGE/DIVISION: College of Education and Psychology

DEPARTMENT: Educational Research and Administration

FUNDING AGENCY/SPONSOR: N/A

IRB COMMITTEE ACTION: Expedited Review Approval

PERIOD OF APPROVAL: 04/16/2018 to 04/15/2019

Lawrence A. Hosman, Ph.D.

Institutional Review Board

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